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THE NOVELS OF

IVAN TURGENEV

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I. RUDIN.
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III. ON THE EVE.
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THE NOVELS OF IVAN TURGENEV

THE TWO FRIENDS AND OTHER STORIES

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

By

CONSTANCE GARNETT

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THE TWO FRIENDS AND OTHER STORIES

THE TWO FRIENDS

On one spring day in the forties of last century, a young man of six and twenty called Boris Andreyitch Vyazovnin arrived at his home, an estate lying in one of the provinces of the central region of Russia. He had just resigned his commission "owing to domestic circumstances," and was intending to look after the management of his land. A praiseworthy idea of course, but Boris Andreyitch had taken it up, as indeed is usually the case, against his will. Every year his income had been falling off while his debts had been increasing. He had become convinced of the impossibility of continuing in the service and living in the capital,—of living in fact as he had lived hitherto,

and, much against the grain, he had made up his mind to devote a few years to setting straight those "domestic circumstances," thanks to which he found himself in the wilds of the country.

Vyazovnin found his estate in disorder, his fields and gardens run to waste, his house almost in ruins. He appointed a new village elder and diminished the allowances of the house serfs. He had two or three rooms cleared for his own use and ordered new shingles to be put on where the roof leaked. He did not, however, take any violent measures, and did not devise any improvements in consequence apparently of the simple reflection that one must, at any rate, just find out what one wants to improve. . . . So he set to work to understand the farming of the land, began, as they say, to go into things. It must be admitted that he went into things without any special zeal and without haste. Being unaccustomed to country life, he found it very dreary, and often could not think where and how to spend the livelong day. He had a good number of neighbours but he was not acquainted with them,—not be-

cause he avoided them but because he had not happened to come into contact with them. But at last in the autumn he did make the acquaintance of one of his nearest neighbours whose name was Pyotr Vassilyitch Krupitsyn. He had once served in the cavalry and had left the army a Lieutenant. His peasants and Vyazovnin's had had a dispute from time immemorial concerning seven acres of mowing land. The quarrel from time to time reached the point of fighting; cocks of hay were mysteriously transferred from place to place, all sorts of unpleasant incidents occurred, and most likely the quarrel would have gone on for many years longer, if Krupitsyn, hearing by chance of Boris Andreyitch's peaceable disposition, had not gone to him to discuss the matter in person. The interview had very agreeable results; in the first place, the trouble was settled at once and for ever to the mutual satisfaction of the landowners, and in the second place they were attracted by each other, took to meeting frequently, and by the winter had become such friends that they were almost inseparable.

And yet they had little in common. Vyazov-

nin, who had come of wealthy parents though he was not himself wealthy, had received a good education, studied at the University, knew several languages, was fond of reading and altogether might be regarded as a man of culture. Krupitsyn, on the contrary, spoke French badly, never took up a book unless he was obliged, and belonged rather to the class of the uncultivated. The friends had little resemblance in appearance either: Vyazovnin was rather tall, thin, fair and like an Englishman; he kept his person, especially his hands, faultlessly clean, was elegant in his dress and foppish over his cravats . . . all habits formed in the capital! Krupitsyn on the other hand was black-haired and dark-skinned, short and stooping, and he went about summer and winter alike in a sort of sack overcoat of bronze-coloured cloth with gaping, bulging pockets.

"I like the colour," Pyotr Vassilyitch used to say, "because it doesn't show the dirt."

The colour of the cloth certainly did not show the dirt but the cloth itself was pretty grimy. Vyazovnin liked dainty fare and talked with zest of the charms of good dinners, and

the importance of taste; Krupitsyn ate anything that was given him, so long as it was something he could work upon. If he came across cabbage soup with boiled grain he swallowed the soup with pleasure and ate up the grain that went with it; if he were offered German clear soup he would fall upon it with the same readiness and if any boiled grain were at hand he would toss it into the same plate and think it was all right. He loved kvass, to use his own expression, "like his own father," while French wines, especially the red ones, he could not endure, calling them "vinegar." Altogether Krupitsyn was very far from being fastidious while Vyazovnin took a clean handkerchief twice a day. In short, the friends, as we have said already, were not alike. One thing they had in common: they were both what is called "good fellows," straightforward, good-natured young men. Krupitsyn had been born one, while Vyazovnin had become one. Moreover they were both further distinguished by the fact that they were not fond of anything in particular; that is, that they had no special passion

or predilection for anything. Krupitsyn was six or eight years older than Vyazovnin.

Their days were spent rather monotonously. As a rule, in the morning, not very early, however, only about ten o'clock, Boris Andreyitch would be sitting, with a book and a cup of tea, by the window, combed and washed, in a handsome dressing-gown hanging open unbuttoned and a snow-white shirt; the door would open and Pyotr Vassilyitch in his usual careless attire would come in. His little estate was less than half a mile from Vyazovna (as Boris Andreyitch's estate was called), though indeed Pyotr Vassilyitch would very often stay the night at Boris Andreyitch's.

"Ah, good-morning," they would both say simultaneously, "how did you sleep?"

And at that point Fedyushka, a boy of fifteen dressed like a Cossack, whose very hair, bristling like the feathers of a ruff in the mating season, looked drowsy, would bring Pyotr Vassilyitch his dressing-gown of Bokhara stuff, and Pyotr Vassilyitch, after clearing his throat as a preliminary, would swathe himself in it and set to his tea and his pipe.

Then talk would begin, talk without haste, with intervals and pauses: they talked of the weather, of yesterday, of the work of the fields and the price of corn; they talked, too, of the neighbouring landowners and their ladies. In the early days of his acquaintance with Boris Andreyitch, Pyotr Vassilyitch had thought it his duty, and had indeed been glad of the opportunity, to question his neighbour concerning life in the capital, and learning and culture generally—in fact concerning lofty subjects: Boris Andreyitch's replies had interested him, often surprised him, and held his attention, but at the same time they had brought on a certain fatigue, so that all such conversations were quickly dropped; and indeed Boris Andreyitch himself displayed no excessive desire to renew them. It happened later on, though not often, that Pyotr Vassilyitch would suddenly ask Boris Andreyitch, for example, what sort of thing the electric telegraph was, and after listening to Boris Andreyitch's not perfectly clear explanation, would sit silent for a little, and then say:

"Yes, that's wonderful," and would make no

enquiry concerning a scientific subject for a long time afterwards.

For the most part conversations between them were after the following style. Pyotr Vassilyitch would inhale the smoke from his pipe and puffing it out through his nostrils would ask:

"What's that new girl you've got? I saw her on the back stairs, Boris Andreyitch."

Boris Andreyitch in his turn would put his cigar to his lips, take two puffs at it, and after a sip of cold tea with cream would bring out:

"What new girl?"

Pyotr Vassílyitch would bend down a little to one side and looking out of the window into the yard where the dog had just bitten a barefoot boy in the calf of the leg would reply:

"Fair-haired . . . not bad looking."

"Ah!" Boris Andreyitch would exclaim, after a pause, "that's my new laundry girl."

"Where does she come from?" Pyotr Vassilyitch would ask as though surprised.

"From Moscow. She's been training there." And both would sit silent for a while.

"How many laundry girls have you got al-

together, Boris Andreyitch?" Pyotr Vassilyitch asks again, looking attentively at the tobacco burning with a dry splutter under the charred ash in his pipe.

"Three," answers Boris Andreyitch.

"Three! I've only one and there's scarcely anything for the one to do; of course, as you know, we don't have a great deal of washing!"

"H'm!" answers Boris Andreyitch, and the conversation drops for a time.

The morning would pass in such occupations and lunch time would arrive. Pyotr Vassilyitch was particularly fond of lunch, and declared that twelve o'clock was precisely the time when a man was hungry; and indeed he ate at that hour so cheerfully, with such a pleasant and hearty appetite, that even a German would have been delighted looking at him: Pyotr Vassilyitch lunched so gloriously! Boris Andreyitch ate far less: he was satisfied with a croquette of chicken or a couple of scrambled eggs with butter and some English sauce in an ingeniously made patent jar for which he had paid a great deal of money and which he secretly thought disgusting, though he declared

that he could not touch anything without it. If the weather were fine the two friends would spend the time between lunch and dinner looking after farming operations, or would simply go for a walk, or look at young horses being broken in, etc. Sometimes they made their way as far as Pyotr Vassilyitch's estate and occasionally went into his little house.

The house, small and very old, was more like a plain house serf's cottage than a landowner's residence. Green moss grew in the thatched roof which was honeycombed with the nests of sparrows and jackdaws. One of the aspen log walls, which had originally been tightly fitted, had dropped back while the others had shifted to one side and sunk into the earth —in short, Pyotr Vassilyitch's house was poor without and poor within.

But Pyotr Vassilyitch was not depressed by that; being a bachelor and generally unexacting he cared little about the conveniences of life, and was satisfied with the fact that he had a little place in which he could at need find shelter from cold and bad weather. His house was managed by the housekeeper, Makedonia,

a middle-aged woman, very zealous and even honest but with an unlucky hand; nothing she did succeeded—the crockery was broken, the linen was torn, the food was uncooked or burnt. Pyotr Vassilyitch used to call her Caligula.

Having a natural bent for hospitality, Pyotr Vassilyitch liked to have visitors in his house and to regale them in spite of the narrowness of his means. He was particularly active in his efforts when Boris Andreyitch visited him, but thanks to Makedonia, who almost flew off her legs at each step in her eagerness to please, poor Pyotr Vassilyitch's festive fare was always a failure, and for the most part did not get further than a piece of stale dried sturgeon and a glass of vodka which he himself described very justly when he said that it was "capital *against* the stomach." After their walk the two friends would return to Boris Andreyitch's house and dine in leisurely fashion. After eating as though he had had no lunch, Pyotr Vassilyitch would retire to some secluded nook and sleep for two or three hours, while Boris Andreyitch would read foreign magazines. In

the evening the friends met again, so great was their friendship. Sometimes they sat down to play preference, sometimes they simply talked as in the morning. Occasionally Pyotr Vassilyitch would take a guitar from the wall and sing in a rather agreeable tenor. Pyotr Vassilyitch was very fond of music,—far more so than Boris Andreyitch, though the latter could not utter the name of Beethoven without a display of enthusiasm and was always intending to order a piano from Moscow. In moments of melancholy or depression Pyotr Vassilyitch had the habit of singing a song connected with the period of his service in the regiment. . . . With peculiar feeling and a little through his nose, he would deliver the following verse:

"No Frenchman ever cooks for us;
A soldier gets our meals for us.
No glorious Rodez plays for us;
No Catalini sings for us.
A bugler greets the dawn for us,
A sergeant brings reports to us." . . .

Boris Andreyitch would sometimes second him, but his voice was disagreeable and not always in tune. At ten o'clock, and sometimes

earlier, the friends parted. . . . And the same thing began again next day.

Sitting one day as usual, a little on one side facing Boris Andreyitch, Pyotr Vassilyitch looked at him rather intently and brought out in a dreamy voice:

"There's one thing I wonder at, Boris Andreyitch."

"What's that?" inquired the latter.

"Why, this. You're young, intelligent, well-educated. What induces you to live in the country?"

Boris Andreyitch looked at his neighbour in surprise.

"Why, you know, Pyotr Vassilyitch," he said at last, "that if it were not for my circumstances . . . circumstances compel me to, Pyotr Vassilyitch."

"Circumstances. Your circumstances are nothing to matter so far. . . . With your estate you can get along all right. You should go into the service." And after a brief pause Pyotr Vassilyitch added: "If I were you I should go into the Uhlans."

"The Uhlans? Why into the Uhlans?"

"Oh, I fancy it would be more suitable for you to be in the Uhlans."

"But excuse me, you were in the Hussars, weren't you?"

"I? Of course I was in the Hussars," Pyotr Vassilyitch said eagerly. "And in what a regiment! You wouldn't find another regiment like it in the whole world! It was a golden regiment! My superior officers, my comrades —what fellows they were! But you, I don't know. . . . You ought to be in the Uhlans, to my thinking. You're fair, you've a slim figure, it's all in keeping."

"But excuse me, Pyotr Vassilyitch. You forget that by the Army regulations I should have to begin as an Ensign. At my age that would be rather difficult. I think it's forbidden, in fact."

"That's true," observed Pyotr Vassilyitch, and he became downcast. "Well, in that case you should get married," he pronounced, suddenly raising his head.

"What queer ideas you've got to-day, Pyotr Vassilyitch," exclaimed Boris Andreyitch.

"Why queer? What's the use of living like

this really? What are you waiting for? You're only losing time. I want to know what advantage it will be to you not to get married."

"But it's not a question of advantage," Boris Andreyitch was beginning.

"No, excuse me," Pyotr Vassilyitch interrupted him, suddenly growing excited. "I can't understand why it is young men are so afraid to be married nowadays! I simply can't understand it. Never mind my not being married, Boris Andreyitch. I wanted to be perhaps and made an offer, but they showed me out," and Pyotr Vassilyitch pointed upwards and outwards with the finger of his right hand towards Boris Andreyitch.

"But with your property how is it you're not married?"

Boris Andreyitch looked intently at Pyotr Vassilyitch.

"Is it amusing to live as a bachelor?" Pyotr Vassilyitch went on. "It's nothing to boast of! It's a poor sort of fun! Really the young men of to-day are a wonder to me." And Pyotr Vassilyitch knocked his pipe against the arm

of his chair with an air of vexation and blew violently into the mouthpiece.

"But who has told you, Pyotr Vassilyitch, that I don't intend to get married?" Boris Andreyitch brought out slowly.

Pyotr Vassilyitch remained motionless, as he was, with his fingers in his spangled maroon velvet tobacco pouch. Boris Andreyitch's words astonished him.

"Yes," Boris Andreyitch went on, "I'm ready to be married. Find me a bride and I'll marry."

"Really?"

"Really."

"No, I say, upon your word?"

"What a fellow you are, Pyotr Vassilyitch! Upon my word I'm not joking."

Pyotr Vassilyitch filled his pipe.

"Well you shall see then, Boris Andreyitch. We'll find you a bride."

"Very good," replied Boris Andreyitch, "but tell me really what do you want to marry me for?"

"Why because, as I told you, you're not fitted for doing nothing like this."

Boris Andreyitch smiled.

"It has always seemed to me, on the contrary, that I was a master at it."

"You misunderstand me," said Pyotr Vassilyitch, and he changed the conversation.

Two days later Pyotr Vassilyitch arrived at his neighbour's not in his usual sack overcoat, but in a frock-coat, the colour of a raven's wing, with a high waist, minute buttons and long sleeves. Pyotr Vassilyitch's moustaches looked almost black from wax, and his hair, curled tightly in front in the form of two long sausages, glistened with pomatum. A big velvet cravat with a satin ribbon tightly compressed Pyotr Vassilyitch's neck and gave a solemn immobility and festive dignity to the whole of the upper part of his person.

"What is the meaning of this get-up?" enquired Boris Andreyitch.

"The meaning of this get-up," replied Pyotr Vassilyitch, sinking into an armchair, but not with his usual carelessness, "is that you must order the carriage; we are going out."

"Where to?"

"To see the bride."

"What bride?"

"Why, have you forgotten already what we were talking about three days ago?"

Boris Andreyitch laughed, though he was inwardly disturbed.

"Upon my word, Pyotr Vassilyitch, why, that was only a joke."

"A joke? How was it then that you swore at the time that you were not joking? No, excuse me, Boris Andreyitch, you must keep your word. I've taken steps already."

Boris Andreyitch was still more disturbed.

"What steps do you mean?" he asked.

"Oh, don't worry yourself. . . . What do you imagine! I have only warned a neighbour of ours, a very charming lady, that we intend to call on her to-day."

"Who is this neighbour?"

"Wait a bit and you will know. Come, you must first dress and order the horses."

Boris Andreyitch looked round him irresolutely.

"Really, Pyotr Vassilyitch, what possessed you! . . . Look at the weather."

"The weather doesn't matter; it's always like that."

"And is it far to drive?"

"About ten miles."

Boris Andreyitch was silent. "But let us at least have lunch first!"

"Lunch, certainly, if you like. Do you know what; you run and dress now. I'll arrange it all while you are gone: a drop of vodka, a morsel of caviare, and we shall be fed at the little widow's. You needn't be anxious about that."

"You don't say she's a widow?" Boris Andreyitch asked, turning round on his way to the door.

Pyotr Vassilyitch shook his head.

"There, you will see, you will see."

Boris Andreyitch went out and shut the door after him, while Pyotr Vassilyitch, left alone, ordered the lunch and the carriage.

Boris Andreyitch spent a considerable time over his toilet. Pyotr Vassilyitch, with a slight frown and a melancholy air, was already drinking his second glass of vodka when Boris Andreyitch appeared at the door of the study. He had taken trouble over dressing. He had put on a full fashionably cut black frock-coat,

the dark mass of which contrasted agreeably with the faint brilliance of the light-grey trousers, a low black cravat, and a handsome dark-blue waistcoat; a gold chain hooked into the lowest buttonhole modestly vanished into the side pocket; the thin high boots creaked in a gentlemanly way, and at Boris Andreyitch's entrance the air was filled with a scent of Ess bouquet combined with the smell of fresh linen.

Pyotr Vassilyitch could only articulate "Ah!" and pick up his cap.

Boris Andreyitch drew a grey kid glove on to his left hand, after first blowing into it; then with the same hand he nervously poured himself out a quarter of a glass of vodka and drank it off; than he took his hat and went with Pyotr Vassilyitch out into the entry.

"I'm doing this entirely on your account," said Boris Andreyitch, as he got into the carriage.

"Supposing it is on my account," said Pyotr Vassilyitch, who was evidently impressed by Boris Andreyitch's elegant appearance; "you will perhaps thank me for it yourself."

And he told the coachman where to drive and how to get there.

The carriage drove off.

"We are going to see Sofya Kirillovna Zadnyeprovskoy," observed Pyotr Vassilyitch after a rather prolonged interval, in the course of which the two friends had sat motionless as though turned to stone. "Have you heard of her?"

"I believe I have," answered Boris Andreyitch. "Why, have you chosen her for a bride for me?"

"And why not? She is a woman of excellent understanding, with property, with the manners, one may say, of Petersburg. But you can have a look at her. That doesn't bind you to anything, you know."

"I should hope not," retorted Boris Andreyitch, "and how old is she?"

"Twenty-five or seven,—not more; in her very prime, as they say!"

It was not ten miles to Madame Zadnyeprovskoy's but a good sixteen and a half, so that Boris Andreyitch was fairly frozen by the end

of the drive and kept hiding his reddening nose in the beaver collar of his greatcoat.

Pyotr Vassilyitch was not afraid of cold as a rule—and especially not so when he was dressed in his holiday dress, then he was more liable to get into a perspiration. Madame Zadnyeprovskoy's homestead consisted of a little new white house with a green roof of suburban style that looked like a summer villa, and a little garden and courtyard. Such villas may frequently be met with near Moscow; in the provinces they are not so common. It was evident that the lady had settled here only recently. The friends got out of the carriage. They were met on the steps by a footman in pea-green trousers and a grey swallowtail coat with rounded edges and buttons with a crest on them; in the entry, which was fairly neat though it had a box seat in it, they were met by another similar footman. Pyotr Vassilyitch bade him take his name and Boris Andreyitch's to his mistress.

The footman did not go to his mistress, but answered that he had orders to show them in.

They went in and through a dining-room in

which a canary was singing in a deafening way, walked into a drawing-room full of fashionable Russian shop-made furniture, very ingeniously constructed and with chairs bent in all directions to provide comfort for the sitter and really very uncomfortable. Two minutes had not elapsed when the rustle of a silk dress was heard in the next room; the curtain over the door was raised and the lady of the house walked with rapid steps into the drawing-room. Pyotr Vassilyitch made a bow and a scrape and introduced Boris Andreyitch.

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance and have long wished to," the lady responded in a free-and-easy tone, scanning him with a rapid glance. "I am very grateful to Pyotr Vassilyitch for bringing me such an agreeable acquaintance; please sit down."

And with a rustle of her skirts the lady sat down on a little low sofa, leaned back in it, stretched out her feet in charming little boots and folded her arms. Her dress was of green glacé silk with whitish lights on it, made with several rows of flounces.

Boris Andreyitch sat down on the low chair

facing her, Pyotr Vassilyitch a little further away. Conversation followed. Boris Andreyitch scrutinised Sofya Kirillovna attentively. She was a tall, well made woman, with a slim waist, dark and rather handsome. The expression of her face, and particularly of her big and shining eyes turned up at the corners like a Chinaman's, betrayed a strange mixture of boldness and timidity and could not have been called natural. She would screw up her eyes and then suddenly open them wide; a smile which tried to seem careless was continually playing on her lips. All Sofya Kirillovna's movements were very free, almost abrupt. Her appearance attracted Boris Andreyitch, however, except that he was disagreeably impressed by the way her hair was parted on one side, which gave a saucy and boyish air to her face; moreover, to his thinking she spoke Russian with excessive purity and correctness. . . .

Boris Andreyitch shared Pushkin's opinion that one can no more love the Russian language without a grammatical mistake than rosy lips without a smile. In short, Sofya Kirillovna belonged to that class of women who are spoken

of by polite men as "ladies who can hold their own," by husbands as "formidable women," and by old bachelors as "festive old girls."

At first the conversation touched upon the extreme dullness of country life.

"There's simply not a living soul here, simply no one to say a word to," said Sofya Kirillovna, pronouncing the letter "s" with peculiar distinctness. "I can't make out the people living here, and those," she added with a grimace, "with whom it would be pleasant to be acquainted,—they don't call, they leave us poor things to our cheerless solitude."

Boris Andreyitch made a slight bow and muttered some awkward apology while Pyotr Vassilyitch merely glanced at him as though to say: "Well, what did I tell you? She's not at a loss for a word, you see."

"Do you smoke?" asked Sofya Kirillovna.

"Yes. . . . But . . ."

"Please do. I smoke myself." And as she said these words the widow took a rather large silver cigar case from the little table, took a cigarette from it and offered it to her guests. Each took a cigarette. Sofya Kirillovna rang

the bell and told a boy with a broad expanse of red waistcoat to bring a light. The boy brought a wax candle on a crystal tray. The cigarettes were lighted.

"Now, for instance, you wouldn't believe," the widow went on lightly, turning her head and puffing a thin coil of smoke upwards, "there are people here who think ladies oughtn't to smoke, and as for riding on horseback, God forbid! They would simply stone one. Yes," she added after a brief pause, "anything that departs from the common level, everything that breaks the rules of an artificial decorum, is subjected to the severest censure here."

"The young ladies in particular are angry about that," observed Pyotr Vassilyitch.

"Yes," replied the widow. "They are the chief sufferers! I don't know them at all, though: scandal won't allow them to visit my solitary retreat."

"And aren't you dull?" asked Boris Andreyitch.

"Dull? No, I read. . . . And when I'm tired of books I dream, I tell my future and put questions to my fate."

"You tell your fortune on cards?" asked Pyotr Vassilyitch.

The widow gave a condescending smile.

"Why shouldn't I tell my fortune? I'm old enough for that."

"Oh, what next!" retorted Pyotr Vassilyitch.

Sofya Kirillovna screwed up her eyes and looked at him.

"Let us drop that subject, though," she said, and turned with alacrity to Boris Andreyitch.

"Listen, Monsieur Vyazovnin. I am convinced that you are interested in Russian literature?"

"Yes. . . . Of course. . . ."

Vyazovnin was fond of reading, but he had read little in Russian and without interest. The more modern literature especially was unknown to him; he had stopped at Pushkin.

"Tell me, please, why has Marlinsky fallen into such disfavour of late? To my thinking it's extremely unjust; what is your view of him?"

"Marlinsky is a writer of merit of course," Boris Andreyitch replied.

"He is a poet; he carries the imagination

away into a world of enchantment and marvels; but of late they've taken to describing everyday life, and upon my word, what good is there in this everyday life here on earth? . . ."

And Sofya Kirillovna waved her hand round her. Boris Andreyitch looked significantly at Sofya Kirillovna.

"I don't agree with you. I think there's a great deal that's good just here," he said, with peculiar emphasis on the last word.

Sofya Kirillovna suddenly broke into an abrupt laugh, while Pyotr Vassilyitch as suddenly raised his head, thought a moment, and fell to smoking again.

The conversation went on in the same style till dinner time, continually changing from one subject to another, which does not happen when a conversation becomes really interesting. Amongst other things they touched upon marriage, its advantages and disadvantages and the position of women in general. Sofya Kirillovna vigorously attacked marriage, became excited at last, and, beginning to feel hot, expressed herself very eloquently, though her

listeners scarcely contradicted her; it was not for nothing that she loved Marlinsky.

She could, too, resort on occasion to the fine flowers of the most up-to-date style. The words "artistic," "æstheticism," "conditioned by" were continuously dropping from her lips.

"What can be of more value to a woman than freedom?—freedom of thought, of feeling, of action," she exclaimed at last.

"But excuse me," said Pyotr Vassilyitch, whose face was beginning to assume a disatisfied expression, "what does woman want freedom for; what will she do with it?"

"How can you ask 'what'? Why, a man wants it to your thinking, doesn't he? To be sure you gentlemen . . ."

"But a man doesn't want it either," Pyotr Vassilyitch interrupted her again.

"How do you mean—doesn't want it?"

"Why, just what I say—that he doesn't. What use to a man is the freedom you praise so? A man who is free—it's a thing we all know—is either bored or plays the fool."

"Then," observed Sofya Kirillovna with an ironical smile, "you are bored, because, know-

ing you to be a sensible man, I can't suppose that you play the fool, as you say."

"Both happen," Pyotr Vassilyitch answered calmly.

"Well, that's charming! However I ought to be grateful to your boredom for giving me the pleasure of seeing you here to-day. . . ."

And satisfied with the tactful turn of her phrase the lady sank back a little, and pronounced in an undertone:

"Your friend, I see, is fond of paradoxes, Monsieur Vyazovnin."

"I haven't noticed it," replied Boris Andreyitch.

"What am I fond of?" asked Pyotr Vassilyitch.

"Paradoxes."

Pyotr Vassilyitch looked into Sofya Kirillovna's eyes and made her no reply but thought to himself: "I know what you're fond of. . . ."

The boy with the red waistcoat came in and announced that dinner was ready.

"Will you come, then?" said the lady, getting up from the sofa, and they all went into the dining-room.

The two friends did not like the dinner.

Pyotr Vassilyitch was hungry when he rose from the table, though there were many dishes; while Boris Andreyitch, who was fond of good fare, was dissatisfied though the food was served under dish covers, and the plates had been heated. The wines, too, were poor, in spite of the magnificent labels, adorned with gold and silver, on the bottles. Sofya Kirillovna talked without ceasing, though from time to time she cast expressive glances at the servants who were handing the dishes, and she drank a fair amount of wine, remarking that in England all the ladies drank wine, while here even that was considered improper. After dinner the lady invited them back into the drawing-room, and asked them which they preferred, tea or coffee. Boris Andreyitch preferred tea, and after emptying his cup inwardly regretted that he had not asked for coffee, while Pyotr Vassilyitch chose coffee, and after emptying it asked for tea, tasted it and put the cup back on the tray.

The lady settled herself in her seat, lighted a cigarette and was evidently not disinclined to

enter on the liveliest conversation: her eyes glowed and her dark cheeks were flushed, but her guests responded listlessly to her sallies, were more absorbed by their smoking, and judging from the looks they bent on the corners of the room were thinking of taking leave.

Boris Andreyitch, however, would probably have consented to stay till evening: he had just entered upon a skirmish with Sofya Kirillovna on her asking coquettishly whether he was not surprised at her living alone without a companion, but Pyotr Vassilyitch was unmistakably in a hurry to go home. He got up, went out into the entry and ordered the horses.

When at last the two friends began saying good-bye and their hostess tried to keep them, and politely upbraided them for staying so short a time, Boris Andreyitch by the irresolute inclination of his person and the simpering expression of his face did at least show that her reproaches had some effect on him; but Pyotr Vassilyitch kept muttering "quite impossible, time to be going, work to do, it's moonlight now," and obstinately backed towards the door. Sofya Kirillovna made them promise, however,

that they would come again in a few days and held out her hand to them for an English *"shake hands."*

Boris Andreyitch alone availed himself of the offer and pressed her fingers rather warmly. She screwed up her eyes and smiled. At that instant Pyotr Vassilyitch was already putting on his greatcoat in the entry.

Before the carriage had driven out of the village he first broke the silence by exclaiming:

"That's not the thing, not the thing, no, it won't do!"

"What do you mean?" Boris Andreyitch asked him.

"It's not the thing, not the thing," repeated Pyotr Vassilyitch, looking away and turning a little aside.

"If you are saying that about Sofya Kirillovna, I don't agree with you; she's a very charming lady, conceited but charming."

"I should think so! Of course if your only object were . . . but you know my motive in wanting to make you acquainted with her."

Boris Andreyitch did not answer.

"Well, I tell you she's not right! I see that

myself. I like that—saying about herself: 'I'm an epicure.' Why, I've two teeth out on the right side here but do you suppose I talk about it? And anyone can see that without my saying so. And besides she's a nice housekeeper, isn't she? Why, she has almost starved me to death. No. What I think is, be free and easy, be learned if you have a turn that way, have *bon ton* if you like, but be a good housekeeper before everything. No, she won't do, she won't do, that's not what you want. There's no dazzling you with those red waistcoats and nightcaps over the dishes."

"But do you want me to be dazzled?" asked Boris Andreyitch.

"Oh, I know what you want,—I know."

"I assure you I'm grateful to you for introducing me to Sofya Kirillovna."

"So much the better, but I say again, she won't do."

The friends arrived home late. As he was leaving Boris Andreyitch, Pyotr Vassilyitch took him by the hand and said:

"I'm not going to let you off though, I'm not going to give you back your promise."

"Very well, I'm at your service," replied Boris Andreyitch.

"That's all right then!" And Pyotr Vassilyitch went off.

A whole week passed again in the usual routine with the only difference, however, that Pyotr Vassilyitch was absent for a whole day. At last one morning he appeared again dressed in his holiday best, and again proposed to Boris Andreyitch to take him with him for a visit. Boris Andreyitch, who had evidently been expecting this invitation with some impatience, obeyed without protest.

"Where are you taking me now?" he asked Pyotr Vassilyitch as he sat beside him in the sledge. Winter had set in since their expedition to Sofya Kirillovna's.

"I'm taking you now," answered Pyotr Vassilyitch impressively, "to a very respectable family—to the Tihoduevs. It's a most respectable family. The old man is a colonel, and an excellent fellow. His wife is an excellent lady; they have two daughters, extremely amiable persons, very well educated, and there is property. I don't know which you will like best.

One, well, is rather livelier, the other is quieter; the other, I confess, is too shy, but there is something to be said for both of them. Well, you will see."

"Very well, I will see," replied Boris Andreyitch, and thought to himself: "Like the Larin family in Onyegin."

And either thanks to this reminiscence or for some other reason, his features assumed an expression of disillusionment and boredom.

"What's the father's name?" he asked casually.

"Kalimon Ivanitch," answered Pyotr Vassilyitch.

"Kalimon! What a name! . . . And the mother?"

"The mother's name is Pelageya Ivanovna."

"And the daughters' names?"

"One is Pelageya too, and the other is Emerentsiya."

"Emerentsiya? I have never heard such a name in my life. . . . And Kalimon too . . ."

"Yes, the name certainly is rather odd. But what a girl she is! Simply, one might say, made of a sort of virtuous fire!"

"Upon my soul, Pyotr Vassilyitch, how poetically you express yourself. But which of them is Emerentsiya—the one that's rather quiet?"

"No, the other. . . . But there, you'll see for yourself."

"Emerentsiya Kalimonovna!" Vyazovnin exclaimed once more.

"Her mother calls her *Emérance,*" Pyotr Vassilyitch observed in an undertone.

"And does she call her husband *Calimon?*"

"That I haven't heard, but there, wait a bit."

"Oh, I'll wait."

To the Tihoduevs' it was a drive of nearly twenty miles, as it had been to Sofya Kirillovna's; but their old-fashioned house was not in the least like the jaunty little villa of the free-and-easy widow.

It was a clumsy building, roomy and rambling, a mass of dark beams with dark panes in the windows. Tall birch-trees stood in two rows on each side; the dark-brown tops of huge lime-trees could be seen behind the roof, the whole house seemed overgrown; in summer all this vegetation probably brightened up the place, in winter it gave it a still more dis-

consolate aspect. The impression made by the inside of the house could not be called cheering either: everything in it looked gloomy and dingy, everything looked older than it really was. The friends sent in their names and were ushered into the drawing-room.

The master and mistress of the house got up to greet them, but for a long time could only welcome them by signs and bodily movements, to which the guests on their side replied only by signs and bows, such a deafening barking was set up by four white sheepdogs who on the appearance of strangers bounded up from the embroidered cushions on which they had been lying. In one way and another, by flapping pocket-handkerchiefs and other means, they pacified the infuriated curs, but a maid-servant was obliged to drag one of them, the oldest and most spiteful, from under a seat and to take it away into a bedroom, getting bitten on her right hand in the process.

When silence was restored, Pyotr Vassilyitch took advantage of it to introduce Boris Andreyitch. Monsieur and Madame Tihoduev simultaneously declared that they were very glad

to meet their new acquaintance; then Kalimon Ivanitch introduced his daughters, calling them Polinka and Eminka. There were two other persons of the female sex, no longer young, in the room, one in a cap and the other in a dark kerchief; but Kalimon Ivanitch did not think fit to introduce Boris Andreyitch to them.

Kalimon Ivanitch was a tall, stoutly built, grey-headed man of about five and fifty; his face expressed nothing in particular: his features were plain and heavy with a stamp of indifference, good nature and indolence upon them. His wife, a thin little woman, with a little face that looked rather the worse for wear and a front of reddish hair under a high cap, seemed in continual agitation; traces of bygone affectation could be detected in her. One of the daughters, Pelageya, a girl with dark hair and a swarthy skin, looked up from under her brows and was wildly shy; on the other hand, Emerentsiya, a fair-haired, plump girl with round red cheeks, with a little pursed-up mouth, a turned-up nose, and sugary eyes, fairly thrust herself forward. It was evident that the duty of entertaining visitors was her responsibility

and did not weigh upon her in the least. Both sisters wore white dresses with light-blue ribbons that fluttered with the slightest movement. Blue suited Emerentsiya, but did not suit Polinka . . . indeed, it would have been difficult to find anything to suit her, though she could not have been called ugly.

The visitors were seated and the usual questions were put to them, pronounced with that mawkish and affected expression of face seen in the most well-bred persons during the first moments of conversation with new acquaintances; the guests replied in the same manner. All this had a somewhat oppressive effect. Kalimon Ivanitch, who was not naturally very resourceful, asked Boris Andreyitch "whether he had been living long in our parts"—though Boris Andreyitch had only just replied to the same question from Pelageya Ivanovna. The lady in a very soft voice—the voice always used before visitors on the day of their first visit—reproached her husband for his absent-mindedness.

Kalimon Ivanitch was rather confused and blew his nose loudly with a check pocket-hand-

kerchief. This sound excited one of the sheep-dogs and it began barking; but Emerentsiya was on the spot at once and soothed it back into silence. The same young lady contrived to render another service to her somewhat helpless parents: she enlivened the conversation by modestly but resolutely sitting down beside Boris Andreyitch and, with the most honeyed air, asking him questions which though trivial were agreeable and calculated to elicit amusing answers. Things were soon going swimmingly; a lively general conversation sprang up in which all but Polinka took part. She looked obstinately at the floor, while Emerentsiya actually laughed, gracefully lifting up one hand and at the same time her manner seemed to be saying: "Look, look, how well-bred and amiable I am and what charming playfulness and friendliness I have with everyone!" She seemed even to be lisping out of good nature. She laughed with lingering dulcet notes though Boris Andreyitch did not at first say anything particularly funny. She laughed still more when Boris Andreyitch, encouraged by the success of his words, began being really witty and mali-

cious. . . . Pyotr Vassilyitch laughed too. Vyazovnin observed among other things that he was passionately fond of music. "And I'm most awfully fond of music too!" exclaimed Emerentsiya.

"You're not only fond of it—you're a first-rate musician yourself," observed Pyotr Vassilyitch.

"Really?" asked Boris Andreyitch.

"Both Emerentsiya Kalimonovna and Pelageya Kalimonovna sing and play the piano very well, especially Emerentsiya Kalimonovna."

On hearing her name Polinka flushed crimson and almost started up from her seat while Emerentsiya modestly cast down her eyes.

"Oh, Mesdemoiselles," said Boris Andreyitch, "surely you will not refuse to be so good . . . to give me the pleasure . . ."

"Really . . . I don't know . . ." And casting a sly glance at Pyotr Vassilyitch, she added reproachfully: "Oh, what a man you are!"

But Pyotr Vassilyitch like a practical person at once appealed to the mistress of the house.

"Pelageya Ivanovna," he said, "please tell your daughters to play or sing us something."

"I don't know whether they are in voice today, but they can try."

"Yes, try, try!" their father urged.

"Oh, *Maman,* but how can we? . . ."

"Emérance, quand je vous dis . . ." Pelageya Ivanovna pronounced in a low voice but very gravely.

She had the habit, common to many mothers, of giving orders or addressing reproofs to her children before other persons in French, even though those persons understood that language, and this practice was the more strange in her case as she knew very little French and pronounced it badly. Emerentsiya got up.

"What are we going to sing, *Maman?"* she asked submissively.

"Your duet; it's very charming. My daughters," Pelageya Ivanovna went on, addressing Boris Andreyitch, "have different voices; Emerentsiya a treble . . ."

"Soprano, you mean?"

"Yes. . . . Yes. . . . *Somprano,* and Polinka contro-alto."

"Ah! Contralto! That's very nice."

"I can't sing to-day," Polinka brought out with an effort. "I am hoarse." Her voice certainly sounded more like a bass than a contralto.

"Ah, well, if so, Emérance, you sing us your piece, the Italian one, our favourite, and Polinka will accompany you."

"The piece where you go pattering like peas," her father chimed in.

"The bravura," explained the mother.

The two young ladies went to the piano. Polinka raised the lid, put a book of manuscript music on the music rest and sat down, while Emerentsiya stood by her, throwing herself not too obviously into charming attitudes under the fixed gaze of Boris Andreyitch and Pyotr Vassilyitch, and at times putting her handkerchief to her lips. At last she began to sing, as for the most part young ladies do sing, shrilly and going off at moments into howls. She did not articulate the words distinctly, but from certain nasal sounds it could be surmised that she was singing in Italian.

Towards the end she really did break into a

"patter like peas" to the huge delight of Kalimon Ivanitch—he raised himself slightly in his easy-chair and exclaimed:

"Give it him!"

But the last trill she let off earlier than she should, so that her sister had to play a few bars by herself. This did not, however, prevent Boris Andreyitch from expressing his pleasure and paying Emerentsiya compliments, while Pyotr Vassilyitch, after repeating twice: "Very good, very good," added: "Couldn't you give us something Russian now; the 'Nightingale,' for instance, or the 'Little Sarafan,' or some gipsy song? These foreign pieces, to tell the truth, are not written for people like us."

"I agree with you," said Kalimon Ivanitch.

"Chantez le Sarafan," the mother observed in an undertone and with the same severity as before.

"No, not the 'Sarafan,' " interposed Kalimon Ivanitch, "but 'We Two Gipsy Girls' or 'Take Off Your Cap and Make a Low Bow'; do you know it?"

"Papa! You are always like that!" Emerentsiya protested, and she sang "Take Off

Your Cap," and sang it fairly well. Kalimon Ivanitch joined in humming and beating time with his foot, while Pyotr Vassilyitch was quite delighted.

"Come, that's a different thing! That's in our style," he declared. "You have delighted me, Emerentsiya Kalimonovna. . . . Now I see that you have the right to call yourself a devotee of music and a mistress of your art."

"Oh, how indiscreet you are!" retorted Emerentsiya, and would have gone back to her seat.

"*A present le 'Sarafan,'*" said the mother.

Emerentsiya sang the "Sarafan," not so successfully as "Take Off Your Cap," but still successfully.

"Now you ought to play us your Sonata duet," observed Pelageya Ivanovna, "though perhaps that will be better another time or I'm afraid we shall weary Monsieur Vyazovnin."

"No . . . indeed . . ." Boris Andreyitch, but Polinka closed the piano at once and Emerentsiya declared that she was tired. Boris Andreyitch thought it necessary to repeat his compliment.

"Oh, Monsieur Vyazovnin," she answered,

"I expect you have heard very different singers; I can imagine what my singing must seem like after them . . . though indeed when Bomerius was here, he did say to me. . . . You've heard of Bomerius, I expect?"

"No; what Bomerius?"

"Good gracious! The celebrated violinist; he studied in the Paris Conservatoire, a wonderful musician. . . . He said to me: 'With your voice, Mademoiselle, if you could study under a good teacher it would be simply marvellous.' He kissed all his fingers to me, but how is one to study here?" And Emerentsiya heaved a sigh.

"No, indeed," Boris Andreyitch assented politely, "but with your talent. . . ." He was at a loss for words and looked away still more politely.

"Emérance, demandez pourquoi que le diner," said Pelageya Ivanovna.

"Qui, Maman," replied Emerentsiya and she went out with a sprightly little skip at the door. She would not have made the skip if there had not been visitors. Boris Andreyitch turned to Polinka.

"If this is the Larin family," he thought, "perhaps this one is Tatyana."

And he went up to Polinka, who watched his approach not without terror.

"You played your sister's accompaniment charmingly," he began, "charmingly!"

Polinka made no answer; she merely turned crimson to her ears.

"I'm very sorry I've not had the pleasure of hearing your duet; from what opera is it?"

Polinka's eyes wandered uneasily.

Vyazovnin waited for her answer; no answer came.

"What sort of music do you like best?" he asked after a brief interval, "Italian or German?"

Polinka looked down.

"Pelagie, repondez donc," Pelageya Ivanovna brought out in an agitated whisper.

"Any sort," Polinka articulated hurriedly.

"Any sort?" Boris Andreyitch persisted. "That's hard to believe. Beethoven, for instance, is a genius of the first rank and yet he is not appreciated by everyone."

"No," answered Polinka.

"Art is infinitely varied," Boris Andreyitch continued mercilessly.

"Yes," answered Polinka. The conversation between them did not last long.

"No," thought Boris Andreyitch as he moved away from her, "she is not a Tatyana; she is simply a tremor personified. . . ."

And when poor Polinka was going to bed that evening she complained with tears to her maid that the visitor to-day had pestered her with music and that she had not known what to answer, and that she was always wretched when visitors came; it only meant that Mamma scolded afterwards, that was all the pleasure she got out of it.

At dinner Boris Andreyitch sat between Kalimon Ivanitch and Emerentsiya. The dinner was Russian, not elaborate but ample, and far more to Pyotr Vassilyitch's taste than the widow's *recherché* dishes. Polinka was sitting beside him, and, overcoming her shyness at last, she did anyway answer his questions.

Emerentsiya, on the other hand, entertained her neighbour so zealously that at last he could hardly endure it. She had the habit of turn-

ing her head to the right while she lifted a morsel to her mouth with the left hand, as if she was playing with it; and Boris Andreyitch very much disliked this habit. He disliked, too, the way in which she incessantly talked about herself, confiding to him with much feeling the most trivial details of her life; but as a well-bred man he made no outward sign of his sentiments, so that Pyotr Vassilyitch, who was watching him across the table, was quite unable to decide what sort of impression Emerentsiya was making upon him.

After dinner Kalimon Ivanitch suddenly sank into meditation, or, to speak more directly, a slight doze; he was accustomed to take a nap after dinner and though, noticing that his guests were preparing to take their leave, he articulated several times: "But why is this, gentlemen, what for? How about a game of cards?" —yet in his heart he was pleased when he saw that they had their caps in their hands. Pelageya Ivanovna on the contrary grew alert at once and with peculiar insistence tried to keep her visitors. Emerentsiya zealously seconded her, and did everything she could to persuade

them to remain; even Polinka said: *"Mais Messieurs. . . ."*

Pyotr Vassilyitch answered neither yes nor no and kept looking towards his companion; but Boris Andreyitch courteously but firmly insisted on the necessity of returning home. It was in fact just the opposite of their leave-taking from Sofya Kirillovna.

Promising to repeat their visit very shortly, the visitors at last withdrew; Emerentsiya's cordial glances followed them to the dining-room, while Kalimon Ivanitch even went out with them to the hall, and after watching Boris Andreyitch's adroit servant wrap the gentlemen in their fur coats, wind their scarves round them, and draw their warm top boots on to their feet, went back to his study and promptly fell asleep, while Polinka, after being put to shame by her mother, went off to her own room upstairs and the two mute feminine figures, one in a cap, the other in a dark kerchief, congratulated Emerentsiya on her new conquest.

The friends drove off in silence. Boris Andreyitch smiled to himself, screened from Pyotr Vassilyitch by the turned-up collar of his rac-

coon-lined coat, and waited to see what he would say.

"Not the thing again!" exclaimed Pyotr Vassilyitch.

But this time a certain indecision was noticeable in his voice, and straining to get a look at Boris Andreyitch over his fur collar, he added in an enquiring voice: "It's not, is it?"

"No," Boris Andreyitch answered with a laugh.

"I thought not," replied Pyotr Vassilyitch, and after a brief silence he added:

"Though, after all, why not? In what way is the young lady deficient?"

"She's not deficient in anything; on the contrary she has too much of everything . . ."

"How do you mean—too much?"

"What I say!"

"Excuse me, Boris Andreyitch, I don't understand you. If you're speaking of culture, is that amiss? And as regards character, conduct . . ."

"Oh, Pyotr Vassilyitch," said Boris Andreyitch, "I'm surprised that with your clear way of looking at things you don't see through that

mincing Emerentsiya! That affected amiability, that continual self-adoration, that modest conviction of her own virtues, that indulgence of an angel looking down on you from the heights of heaven,—but there's no need of words! If it came to that, in case of necessity I'd twenty times rather marry her sister. She does know how to hold her tongue, anyway!"

"You're right, of course," poor Pyotr Vassilyitch answered in a low voice. Boris Andreyitch's sudden outburst perplexed him.

"No," he said to himself, and he said it for the first time since his acquaintance with Vyazovnin, "this fellow's not on my level. . . . He's too well educated. . . ."

Vyazovnin for his part was thinking as he gazed at the moon which hung low over the white rim of the horizon: "And that might be out of Onyegin too. . . .

" 'Round ruddy-cheeked is she?'

"But a queer sort of Lensky I've got and I'm a fine Onyegin."

"Go on, go on, Laryushka!" he added aloud.

"So it's not the thing?" Boris Andreyitch asked Pyotr Vassilyitch jestingly, as with the

assistance of his groom he got out of the sledge and mounted the steps of his house: "Eh, Pyotr Vassilyitch?"

But Pyotr Vassilyitch made him no answer, and went home that night to sleep.

Emerentsiya next day wrote to her friend (she carried on a vast and active correspondence):

"A new visitor came to see us yesterday, a neighbour called Vyazovnin. He is a very charming and amiable person; one can see at once that he is highly cultured and—shall I whisper it in your ear?—I fancy I made rather an impression upon him. But don't be uneasy, *mon amie;* my heart was not touched and Valentin has nothing to fear."

The Valentin referred to was a high-school teacher. He was a gay dog when he was in the town, while in the country he heaved platonic and hopeless sighs for Emerentsiya.

The friends met again next morning as usual and their life flowed on in its old way.

A fortnight passed. Boris Andreyitch was in daily expectation of a fresh summons but

Pyotr Vassilyitch seemed to have completely relinquished his design.

Boris Andreyitch began talking of the widow and of the Tihoduevs, and hinting that one ought to give everything three trials; but Pyotr Vassilyitch gave no sign of understanding his hints. At last Boris Andreyitch could not refrain from beginning.

"How's this, Pyotr Vassilyitch?" he said. "It seems it's my turn now to remind you of your promises."

"What promises?"

"Don't you remember you meant to marry me; I am waiting."

Pyotr Vassilyitch turned round on his chair.

"But you see, you're so particular! There's no satisfying you! God knows what you want. It seems we've no young ladies here to your taste."

"That's too bad, Pyotr Vassilyitch. You ought not to despair so soon. To fail twice is not much to complain of. Besides, I did like the widow. If you abandon me, I'll go off to her."

"Well, go then,—and God bless you."

"Pyotr Vassilyitch, I assure you, I do want to get married, in earnest; take me somewhere else."

"But really there is no one else in the whole district."

"That's impossible, Pyotr Vassilyitch. Do you mean to say there's not one pretty girl here in the whole neighbourhood?"

"Of course there are plenty, but not a match for you."

"But do name someone, anyway."

Pyotr Vassilyitch held the amber of his pipe in his teeth.

"Well, there's Verotchka Barsukov, of course," he brought out at last; "what could be better? Only not for you."

"Why not?"

"Too simple."

"All the better, Pyotr Vassilyitch. All the better."

"And her father is such a queer fish."

"That doesn't matter either. . . . Pyotr Vassilyitch, my dear fellow, do introduce me to this . . . what did you call the young lady?"

"Barsukov."

"To this Barsukov girl . . . please."

And Boris Andreyitch gave Pyotr Vassilyitch no rest until the latter promised to take him to the Barsukovs.

Two days later they drove off to see them.

The Barsukov family consisted of two persons, the father, aged fifty, and the daughter, aged nineteen. Pyotr Vassilyitch had correctly described the father as a queer fish; he really was a singular person if ever there was one. After brilliantly completing a course of study in a Government institution, he entered the Marine service, and quickly attracted the attention of his superior officers. But he suddenly retired from the Service, married, settled in the country, and by degrees had grown lazy and let himself go to such a point that he not merely gave up going out anywhere, but did not even leave his room.

In a short, full, hareskin coat and slippers without any back to them, with his hands thrust in the pockets of his loose Turkish trousers, he would walk to and fro for days together, humming or whistling, and whatever was said to

him he would answer with a smile: "Braoo, Braoo," by which he meant, "Bravo, Bravo."

"Do you know Stepan Petrovitch?" a neighbour would say to him, for instance,—and neighbours went to see him readily, for no man could have been more hospitable and genial:—"Do you know they say the price of rye has gone up to thirteen paper roubles at Byelovo?"

"Braoo, Braoo," Barsukov would answer calmly, though he had just sold his rye for seven and a half.

"And have you heard that your neighbour Pavel Fomitch has lost twenty thousand at cards?"

"Braoo, Braoo," Barsukov would answer just as calmly.

"There's the cattle-plague at Salykovo," another neighbour sitting with them would observe.

"Braoo, Braoo!"

"The Lapin young lady has run off with the bailiff."

"Braoo, Braoo, Braoo!"

And so on endlessly. If he were informed that his horse had gone lame, that a Jew had

arrived with goods, that the clock had fallen off the wall, that the boy had mislaid his boots somewhere,—the only comment heard from him was "Braoo, Braoo," and yet there was no great disorder to be noticed in his house: his peasants were prosperous and he made no debts. Barsukov's appearance was prepossessing: his round face with large brown eyes, a delicate, regular nose and red lips, was remarkable from its almost youthful freshness. This freshness was the more striking from the snowy whiteness of his hair; a faint smile was almost continually playing on his lips, and not so much on his lips as in the dimples in his cheeks; he never laughed, but sometimes, very rarely, giggled hysterically, and on every such occasion felt unwell afterwards. Apart from his habitual exclamation he said very little and only what was quite essential, with the utmost possible brevity.

His daughter Verotchka was very much like him in face, in her way of smiling and in the expression of her dark eyes, which seemed still darker from the delicate tint of her flaxen hair. She was rather short and charmingly propor-

tioned. There was nothing specially attractive about her, but one had only to glance at her or hear the sound of her voice to say to oneself: "That's a good kind creature." The father and daughter were fond of each other; the whole management of the house was in her hands and she liked looking after it. . . . She had no other pursuits. Pyotr Vassilyitch had correctly described her as simple.

When Pyotr Vassilyitch and Boris Andreyitch called upon Barsukov he was as usual walking up and down in his study. This study, which might have been called a drawing-room and a dining-room, since visitors were received and meals were served in it, formed about half of the little house.

The furniture in it was ugly but comfortable; along the whole length of one of the walls stood an extremely broad and soft sofa with a multitude of cushions,—a sofa very well known to all the gentlemen of the neighbourhood.

To tell the truth one could lie luxuriously on that sofa. In the other rooms there were only chairs, little tables of one sort or another,

and cupboards; all these rooms led into one another and no one lived in them. Verotchka's little bedroom looked into the garden and except for her neat little bed and washing stand with a little looking-glass over it and one armchair there was no furniture in it either. On the other hand everywhere, in all the corners, there were bottles of liqueurs and jars of jam prepared by Verotchka's own hand.

On going into the hall Pyotr Vassilyitch would have sent in his name and Boris Andreyitch's, but a boy in a long-skirted coat merely glanced at him and began taking off his fur coat with the words: "Please walk in, Sir."

The friends went into Stepan Petrovitch's study. Pyotr Vassilyitch introduced Boris Andreyitch.

Stepan Petrovitch pressed his hand, articulated: "Delighted . . . very . . . you're cold . . . vodka?" and with a motion of his head indicating the edibles that stood on a little table, he fell to pacing up and down the room again.

Boris Andreyitch drank off a little glass of

vodka. Pyotr Vassilyitch did the same and they both sat down on the broad sofa with a multitude of cushions. Boris Andreyitch felt at once as though he had been sitting on that sofa for ages and had known the master of the house for long, long years. All Barsukov's visitors were familiar with that feeling.

He was not alone that day; and indeed he could not often be found alone. There was sitting with him a pettifogging clerk, a threadbare hack with a wrinkled face like an old woman's, a hawk nose and restless eyes, who had lately had a snug little job in the Government service, but was at the moment awaiting his trial for some malpractice. Holding on to his cravat with one hand and the lapel of his coat with the other, this gentleman was keeping watch on Stepan Petrovitch and, waiting till the guests were seated, he brought out with a deep sigh:

"Oh, Stepan Petrovitch, Stepan Petrovitch! It's easy to condemn a man; but you know the saying: 'The honest man's a sinner, the rogue's a sinner, they all live by sin and so do we.'"

"Braoo," Stepan Petrovitch was beginning, but he checked himself and commented:

"A nasty saying."

"Who denies it? Of course it's nasty," replied the threadbare gentleman; "but what would you have one do! Poverty is not one's brother, you know; it eats the honesty out of you. Here I'm ready to appeal to these noble gentlemen if only they'll be so good as to listen to the circumstances of my case. . . ."

"May I smoke?" Boris Andreyitch asked his host. The latter nodded.

"Of course," the threadbare gentleman continued, "I, too, perhaps have more than once been vexed both with myself and the world generally, have felt, so to say, the generous indignation . . ."

"Invented by scoundrels," Stepan Petrovitch interrupted.

The gentleman started.

"That is. . . . How's that, Stepan Petrovitch? Do you mean to say that generous indignation is invented by scoundrels?"

Stepan Petrovitch gave a nod again.

The gentleman was silent for a moment, then

suddenly broke into a cracked laugh, displaying as he did so that he had not a tooth left in his head, yet he spoke fairly clearly. "He, he, Stepan Petrovitch, you always talk like that. Our attorney may well say of you that you're a regular humourist."

"Braoo, Braoo!" replied Barsukov.

At that instant the door opened and Verotchka walked in. Moving with a firm and light tread, she brought in two cups of coffee and a jug of cream on a round green tray. Her dark-grey dress hung gracefully about her slender form. Boris Andreyitch and Pyotr Vassilyitch both got up from the sofa; she made them a curtsey in response, without putting down the tray, then going up to the table, laid her burden on it with the words: "Here is your coffee."

"Braoo," said her father. "Two more cups," he added, indicating the visitors. "Boris Andreyitch, my daughter."

Boris Andreyitch made her a second bow.

"Will you have coffee?" she asked, looking quietly straight into his eyes. "It's an hour and a half to dinner time."

"With the greatest pleasure," answered Boris Andreyitch.

Verotchka turned to Krupitsyn, "And you, Pyotr Vassilyitch?"

"I'll have a cup too."

"In a minute. It's a long time since I've seen you, Pyotr Vassilyitch." Saying this, Verotchka went out.

Boris Andreyitch looked after her and bending down to his friend, whispered in his ear:

"But she's very sweet . . . and what easy manners! . . ."

"That's habit," Pyotr Vassilyitch answered. "Why, it's something like a restaurant here; there's always someone coming or going."

As though to confirm Pyotr Vassilyitch's words another visitor walked into the room. This was a very corpulent, to use the old-fashioned word that has been preserved in our part of the country, full-bodied gentleman with a big face, big eyes and lips and thick ruffled hair. An expression of permanent dissatisfaction, a sour expression, could be detected in his countenance. He was wearing a very roomy coat and his whole person swayed as he walked.

He sank heavily onto the sofa and only then said "Good-day," without, however, addressing any one of the company in particular.

"Vodka?" Stepan Petrovitch asked him.

"No! Vodka indeed!" answered the new guest. "I don't want vodka. How are you, Pyotr Vassilyitch?" he added, looking round.

"Good-day, Mihey Miheyitch," answered Pyotr Vassilyitch; "where's God brought you from?"

"Where from? From town, of course. It's only you lucky fellows who've no need to go to town, but I, thanks to the trustees and to these gentry," he added, jerking his finger in the direction of the gentleman who was awaiting his trial, "I've knocked up all my horses trailing off to the town—confound it!"

"Our humble respects to Mihey Miheyitch," said the gentleman who had been so unceremoniously included in the term "gentry." Mihey Miheyitch looked at him.

"Tell me one thing, please," he began, folding his arms, "when are you going to be hanged?" The other was offended.

"But you ought to be! Upon my soul, you

ought! The Government is too indulgent to fellows like you. Let me tell you that! Why, does it trouble you that you're to be tried? Not a bit of it. There's only one thing may be annoying now, there's no *haben sie gewesen* now!"

And Mihey Miheyitch made a motion with his hand as though he had caught something in the air and thrust it into his side pocket.

"They've put a stop to that! Ah, you riff-raff!"

"You're always pleased to be joking," replied the retired Government clerk, "and you will not take into consideration that he who gives is free to give and he who takes to take. Besides I have not acted in this affair on my own initiative. Another person has taken the principal part, as I have explained. . . ."

"Of course," Mihey Miheyitch observed ironically, "the fox hid under the harrow from the rain—not every drop would fall on her anyway. But you must own our police captain gave you a good wigging? Eh? It was a sound one?"

The threadbare gentleman winced.

"He's a man quick to come down on you," he said at last with hesitation.

"I should think so!"

"With all that, though, of him one could . . ."

"He's a priceless man, a real treasure," Mihey Miheyitch interrupted him, addressing Stepan Petrovitch, "for dealing with these fine fellows and for drunkards, too, he's a giant."

"Braoo, Braoo," commented Stepan Petrovitch. Verotchka came in with two more cups of coffee on a tray. Mihey Miheyitch bowed to her.

"One more," said her father.

"Why do you take all this trouble yourself?" Boris Andreyitch said as he took the cup from her.

"It's no trouble," answered Verotchka, "and I don't want to leave it to the man; it seems to me it will be nicer so."

"Of course, from your hands."

But Verotchka did not hear his politeness; she went out and came back at once with coffee for Mihey Miheyitch.

"Have you heard," Mihey Miheyitch began,

when he had emptied his cup, "Mavra Ilyinitchna is lying speechless?"

Stepan Petrovitch stopped and raised his head.

"Yes, yes," Mihey Miheyitch went on, "paralysis. You know how fond she was of good eating. Well, the day before yesterday she was sitting at table, and visitors with her, they served cold kvass soup and she had just had two platesful and asked for a third—all at once she looked round and said, like this without any haste, you know: 'Take away the soup, all the people are green . . .' and fell flop off her chair. They flew to pick her up and asked her what was the matter . . . she explained with her hands, but her tongue wouldn't work. They say our district apothecary distinguished himself on the occasion. . . . He leapt up and cried: 'A doctor! Send for a doctor!' He quite lost his head. And after all, what is his practice? He simply lives on dead bodies."

"Bra-oo, Bra-oo," Barsukov articulated pensively.

"And we're going to have kvass soup to-

day," observed Verotchka, sitting down in the corner on the edge of a chair.

"What with, with sturgeon?" Mihey Miheyitch asked quickly.

"Yes, with sturgeon."

"That's a capital thing. Here they say kvass soup is not a good thing in winter because it's a cold dish. That's nonsense, isn't it, Pyotr Vassilyitch?"

"Absolute nonsense," answered Pyotr Vassilyitch. "Why, isn't it warm here in this room?"

"Very warm."

"Then why shouldn't one eat a cold dish in a warm room? I don't understand."

"And I don't understand either."

The conversation continued for a good while in this style. The master of the house took hardly any part in it and kept on walking about the room. At dinner everyone did very well indeed: everything was good though simply prepared. Verotchka sat at the head, helped the kvass soup, sent round the dishes, watched how her guests were getting on, and tried to anticipate their wants.

Vyazovnin sat beside her and watched her intently. Verotchka like her father could not speak without smiling and that was very becoming to her. Vyazovnin addressed her from time to time with a question, not for the sake of getting any answer from her but merely to see that smile. After dinner Mihey Miheyitch, Pyotr Vassilyitch and the gentleman awaiting his trial, whose name was Onufry Ilyitch, sat down to play cards. Mihey Miheyitch did not again speak so cruelly of him, though he continued to banter him; possibly this was due to the fact that Mihey Miheyitch had had a drop too much at dinner. He did, it is true, declare at every deal that all the aces and trumps would be sure to be Onufry's, that that nettle-seed would have some dodge in shuffling, that his hands were made for plunder; but on the other hand after they had won a game together Mihey Miheyitch quite unexpectedly praised him.

"Well, say what you like, you're a bad lot of course, but 'pon my soul I like you; in the first place, because that's my temperament, and in the second, because if one comes to think

of it there are plenty worse than you, and indeed one may say that in your own way you're a decent fellow."

"You're pleased to tell the truth, Mihey Miheyitch," replied Onufry Ilyitch, greatly encouraged by these words. "The holy truth; only persecution of course. . . ."

"Come, deal, deal," Mihey Miheyitch interrupted him. "Persecution, indeed! What persecution? Thank God you're not sitting in the Pugatchev tower in chains. . . . Deal."

And Onufry Ilyitch proceeded to deal, rapidly winking his eyes and still more rapidly moistening the forefinger of his right hand with his long thin tongue. Meanwhile Stepan Petrovitch was walking about the room, while Boris Andreyitch kept near Verotchka. The conversation between them was fragmentary (she was continually going out) and so insignificant that it would be difficult to reproduce it. He asked her who lived in their neighbourhood, whether she often went out visiting, whether she liked keeping house. To the question what she was reading, she answered: "I ought to read but I've no time." And yet when

at nightfall a boy came into the study announcing that their horses were ready, he was sorry to be going away, sorry not to go on seeing those kind eyes, that bright smile. If Stepan Petrovitch had thought fit to ask him he would certainly have stayed the night; but Stepan Petrovitch did not do so,—not because he was not pleased with his new visitor but because his rule was that if anyone wanted to stay the night he gave orders at once himself that a bed should be prepared for him. Mihey Miheyitch and Onufry Ilyitch did so; they even slept in the same room and talked long after midnight. Their voices were dimly audible from the study; Onufry Ilyitch talked most and seemed to be telling some story or trying to prove something while his companion merely uttered at intervals, sometimes in a dubious, sometimes in an approving tone: "H'm." Next morning they drove away together to Mihey Miheyitch's estate and from there to the town, also together.

On their way home Boris Andreyitch and Pyotr Vassilyitch were for a long time silent. Pyotr Vassilyitch even dropped asleep, lulled

by the tinkling of the bell and the even motion of the sledge.

"Pyotr Vassilyitch," Boris Andreyitch said at last.

"Well," said Pyotr Vassilyitch, half asleep.

"Why is it you don't question me?"

"Question you about what?"

"Why, as you did the other times."

"About Verotchka, do you mean?"

"Yes!"

"So that's what you're after! Do you suppose I meant her for you? She's not fit for you."

"You're wrong in thinking that; I like her far better than all your Emerentsiyas and Sofya Kirillovnas."

"What do you mean?"

"What I tell you."

"But come now, really! She's quite a simple girl. She may be a good housekeeper, it's true, but that's not what you want, you know."

"Why not? Perhaps that's just what I'm looking for."

"What are you talking about, Boris An-

dreyitch! Upon my word! Why, she doesn't speak French at all!"

"What of it? Do you suppose one can't do without French?"

Pyotr Vassilyitch was silent for a space.

"I hadn't expected this at all . . . from you, that is. . . . I believe you are joking."

"No, I'm not joking."

"God knows what to make of you then! Why, I thought she was only suited for a fellow like me. However, she really is a first-rate girl." And Pyotr Vassilyitch straightened his cap, thrust his head into the pillow and fell asleep.

Boris Andreyitch went on thinking about Verotchka. He was haunted by her smile, by the good-humoured mildness of her eyes. The night was light and cold, the snow glistened with blue gleams like diamonds; the sky was spangled with stars and the pleiades twinkled brightly; the frost crunched and crackled under the runners; the twigs on the trees covered with icy hoarfrost faintly tinkled, glittering in the moonlight as though they were made of glass. At such a time the imagination

works eagerly. Vyazovnin experienced this. He pondered all sorts of things before the sledge stopped at last at his steps; but the image of Verotchka never left his brain and secretly accompanied his dreams.

As we have mentioned already, Pyotr Vassilyitch was surprised at the impression Verotchka had made on Boris Andreyitch, but he was still more surprised two days later when his friend announced that he meant to go to Barsukov's and that he should go alone if Pyotr Vassilyitch were not disposed to accompany him. Pyotr Vassilyitch replied of course that he was ready and delighted, and the friends drove off to Barsukov's again, and again spent the whole day there. As on the first occasion, they found several visitors whom Verotchka regaled with coffee and after dinner with jam; but Vyazovnin had more conversation with her than on the first visit; that is, he talked more to her. He told her about his past life, about Petersburg, about his travels,—in fact about anything that came into his head. She listened to him with quiet interest, continually smiling and looking at him, but never for a moment

forgot her duties as a hostess: she got up at once as soon as she noticed that her visitors needed anything and brought them everything herself. When she went away, Vyazovnin looked placidly about him and did not leave his seat; she came back, sat down beside him and took up her work, and he entered into conversation with her again. Stepan Petrovitch would go up to them, listen to Vyazovnin's remarks and mutter: "Bra-oo, Bra-oo," and the hours simply raced by. This time the two friends stayed the night and only went home late in the evening of the following day. . . .

At parting Vyazovnin pressed Verotchka's hand. She flushed a little. No man had ever pressed her hand till that day, but she thought that that was what they did in Petersburg.

The two friends began going frequently to see Stepan Petrovitch, and Boris Andreyitch in particular became quite at home in his house. At times he had a great craving, an intense longing to be there. On several occasions he went alone. He liked Verotchka more and more; already a friendship had arisen between them, already he was beginning to think that

she was too cool and reasonable a friend. Pyotr Vassilyitch left off speaking to him of Verotchka . . . but one morning, after looking at him as usual for some time without speaking, he brought out significantly:

"Boris Andreyitch."

"Well?" replied Boris Andreyitch, and he coloured a little though he could not say why.

"There is something I wanted to say to you, Boris Andreyitch. . . . Mind you don't . . . er . . . it would be bad, you know, if anything, for instance . . ."

"What do you mean?" said Boris Andreyitch. "I don't understand you."

"Why, about Verotchka. . . ."

"About Verotchka?" And Boris Andreyitch flushed redder.

"Yes. Take care, you know, harm is soon done. . . . Wrong, that is . . . excuse my openness; but I imagine it's my duty as a friend . . ."

"But where did you get that idea, Pyotr Vassilyitch?" Boris Andreyitch interrupted him. "Verotchka's a girl of the strictest principles,

and, besides, there's nothing between us but the most ordinary friendship."

"Oh, nonsense, Boris Andreyitch," Pyotr Vassilyitch retorted in his turn. "How can a cultivated man like you have a friendship with a country girl who has never been outside her own four walls?"

"You're at that again!" Boris Andreyitch interrupted him for the second time. "What you drag culture in for I can't imagine." Boris Andreyitch was a little irritated.

"Well, listen, anyway, Boris Andreyitch," Pyotr Vassilyitch said impatiently. "Since it's come to this, I must tell you, you have a perfect right to be reserved with me, but as for deceiving me, excuse me, you don't. I have eyes too. Yesterday"—they had been together at Stepan Petrovitch's the evening before—"revealed a great deal to me. . . ."

"And what precisely did it reveal to you?" asked Boris Andreyitch.

"It revealed to me that you love her and are even jealous over her."

Vyazovnin looked at Pyotr Vassilyitch.

"Well, and does she love me?"

"That I can't say for certain, but it would be strange if she didn't love you."

"Because I'm cultivated, you mean to say?"

"Both because of that and because you are well off. And your appearance is attractive, too, but the property is the chief thing."

Vyazovnin got up and went to the window.

"How could you see that I was jealous?" he suddenly asked, turning to Pyotr Vassilyitch.

"Why, you were not like yourself yesterday till that scamp Karantyev had gone."

Vyazovnin made no answer, but in his soul he felt that his friend had spoken the truth.

This Karantyev was a student who had not completed his studies, a good-humoured fellow not without intelligence and feeling, but utterly nonsensical and hopelessly ruined. His powers had been dissipated by his passions in early youth; he had been left too young without guardianship. He had a reckless gipsy face and was altogether like a gipsy, singing and dancing like one. He fell in love with every woman he met. Verotchka attracted him very much. Boris Andreyitch had made his acquaintance at Barsukov's and had at first been

very well disposed towards him; but on one occasion, observing the peculiar expression of face with which Verotchka listened to his singing, he began to feel differently about him.

"Pyotr Vassilyitch," said Boris Andreyitch, going up to his friend and standing facing him, "I ought to own . . . I believe you're right. I have felt it for a long time, but you have completely opened my eyes. I certainly am not indifferent to Verotchka; but, Pyotr Vassilyitch, what of it? She and I both of us want nothing dishonourable; besides, as I've told you already, I see no special signs on her part of a liking for me."

"Quite so," replied Pyotr Vassilyitch, "but the Evil One is powerful."

Boris Andreyitch was silent for a while.

"What am I to do, Pyotr Vassilyitch?"

"What are you to do? Give up going there."

"You think so?"

"Of course. . . . You're not going to marry her!"

Vyazovnin was silent for a space again.

"And why shouldn't I marry her?" he exclaimed at last.

"I've told you why already, Boris Andreyitch; she's not a match for you."

"I don't see that."

"Well, if you don't see it, do as you think best. I'm not your guardian."

And Pyotr Vassilyitch began filling his pipe.

Boris Andreyitch sat in the window and sank into thought. Pyotr Vassilyitch did not interrupt his musings but with great composure puffed little clouds of smoke from his lips. At last Boris Andreyitch got up and with noticeable excitement ordered his carriage.

"Where to?" Pyotr Vassilyitch asked him.

"To the Barsukovs," Boris Andreyitch answered abruptly.

Pyotr Vassilyitch puffed half a dozen times.

"Am I to go with you or what?"

"No, Pyotr Vassilyitch. I should like to go alone to-day; I want to come to an understanding with Verotchka herself."

"You know best."

"So," he said to himself as he saw Boris Andreyitch out, "this is how a joke has turned to earnest when one comes to think of it . . .

and all through idleness," he added as he settled himself on the sofa.

On the evening of the same day Pyotr Vassilyitch, who had gone home without awaiting his friend's return, was just going to bed when all at once Boris Andreyitch, covered with powdery snow, dashed into his room and threw himself on his neck.

"My friend, Pyotr Vassilyitch, congratulate me," he exclaimed. "She has accepted me and the old man has given his consent too. . . . It's all settled!"

"How's that? . . . What do you mean?" Pyotr Vassilyitch muttered in astonishment.

"I'm going to get married!"

"To Verotchka?"

"Yes. . . . It's all settled and arranged."

"It can't be!"

"What a man you are; I tell you it's all settled."

Pyotr Vassilyitch hurriedly slid his bare feet into slippers, flung on his dressing gown and shouted:

"Makedoniya, tea!" and added: "Well, since it's all settled it's no use talking about it; God

give you concord and counsel! But please tell me how it all happened."

"With pleasure, if you like," answered Vyazovnin, and began telling him.

This was how it really had happened.

When Boris Andreyitch had arrived at Stepan Petrovitch's, the latter, contrary to his usual habit, had no visitor with him and was not walking up and down the room but was sitting in an invalid chair; he was not very well.

When this was the case he gave up talking altogether; and so he merely gave Vyazovnin a friendly nod, first pointing him to the table with food on it and then to Verotchka, and closed his eyes.

This was all Vyazovnin wanted; he sat down by Verotchka and began talking to her in a low voice. They spoke of Stepan Petrovitch's health.

"I'm always frightened," Verotchka said in a whisper, "when he is unwell. You know what he is; he doesn't complain, doesn't ask for anything, you can't get a word out of him. He'll be ill and say nothing."

"And you love him very much?" Vyazovnin asked her.

"Whom? Father? Yes, more than anyone in the world. God preserve us from anything happening to him. I believe I should die."

"Then it would be impossible for you to part from him?"

"Part? What should I part from him for?"

Boris Andreyitch looked into her face.

"A girl can't live all her life in her father's house."

"Ah—I see what you mean. Well, I needn't trouble then. Who would have me?"

"I," Boris Andreyitch was almost saying, but he restrained himself.

"What are you thinking?" she asked, looking at him with her habitual smile.

"I think . . ." he replied, "I think . . . that . . ."

And suddenly changing his tune, he asked her how long she had known Karantyev.

"I really don't remember. . . . You see, so many of them come to see father. I believe he came to see us for the first time last year."

"Tell me—do you like him?"

"No," answered Verotchka after a moment's thought.

"Why not?"

"He's so untidy," she answered simply. "But he must be a good fellow and he sings so splendidly. . . . It stirs one's heart when he sings."

"Ah!" Vyazovnin commented, and after a brief pause he added, "Whom do you like then?"

"I like a great many people,—I like you."

"You and I are friends, we know, but is there no one you like more than the rest?"

"How inquisitive you are!"

"And you are very cold."

"How so?" Verotchka asked naïvely.

"Listen," Vyazovnin was beginning. . . . But at that instant Stepan Petrovitch turned in his chair.

"Listen," he went on, hardly audibly, while the blood seemed to be throbbing in his throat. "There is something I must say to you, very important,—only not here."

"Where then?"

"Why, in the next room, for instance."

"What is it? A secret, then?" said Verotchka, getting up.

"Yes, a secret."

"A secret," repeated Verotchka wonderingly and she went into the next room.

Vyazovnin followed her as though in a fever.

"Well, what is it?" she asked him with curiosity.

Boris Andreyitch meant to lead up to the subject, but glancing at that youthful face beaming with the faint smile which he so loved, at those clear eyes gazing at him with such a soft look, he lost his head and quite to his own surprise asked Verotchka bluntly, without any preliminary:

"Vera Stepanovna, will you be my wife?"

"What?" said Verotchka, turning hot all over and flushing crimson to her ears.

"Will you be my wife?" Vyazovnin repeated mechanically.

"I . . . I really don't know, I didn't expect . . . it's so . . ." whispered Verotchka, stretching out her hand to the window-sill to steady herself,—and all at once she rushed out of the room into her bedroom.

Boris Andreyitch remained standing where he was for a little while, then in great confusion went back to the study. On the table lay a number of the *Moscow News*. He took it up and began looking at the printed lines, not only without understanding what was in them but even without any idea of what was happening to him generally. He spent a quarter of an hour in this condition; but all at once there was a faint rustle behind him and without looking round he felt that Verotchka had come in.

A few more moments passed; he stole a glance at her from behind the pages of the *Moscow News*. She was sitting in the window, turned away from him, and she looked pale. At last he plucked up courage and got up, went to her and dropped into a chair beside her.

Stepan Petrovitch did not stir, sitting in his low chair with his head thrown back.

"Forgive me, Vera Stepanovna," Vyazovnin began with some effort. "I am to blame, I ought not so suddenly . . . and besides . . . I had of course no grounds . . ."

Verotchka made no answer.

"But since it has happened like this," Boris Andreyitch went on, "I should like to know what answer . . ."

Verotchka gently bowed her head, her cheeks flushed again.

"Vera Stepanovna, one word."

"I don't know, really . . ." she began, "Boris Andreyitch . . . it depends on father. . . ."

"Unwell?" Stepan Petrovitch's voice asked suddenly.

Verotchka started and quickly raised her head. Stepan Petrovitch's eyes fastened upon her expressed uneasiness. She went up to him at once.

"You are asking me something, father?"

"Feeling unwell?" he repeated.

"Who? . . . I? . . . No. . . . What makes you think so?"

He looked at her intently.

"Really quite well?" he asked once more.

"Of course; how do you feel?"

"Braoo, Bra-oo," he said softly and closed his eyes again.

Verotchka turned towards the door, Boris Andreyitch stopped her.

"Tell me, anyway, do you allow me to speak to your father?"

"If you like," she whispered, "only, Boris Andreyitch, I think I am not a match for you."

Boris Andreyitch would have taken her hand; but she evaded him and went away. "Strange!" he thought. "She says exactly the same thing as Krupitsyn."

Left alone with Stepan Petrovitch, Boris Andreyitch vowed to explain things more sensibly to him and as far as possible to prepare him for the unexpected proposal; but his task turned out in reality even more difficult than speaking to Verotchka.

Stepan Petrovitch was a little feverish and in a state between brooding and dozing. He made reluctant and tardy answers to the various questions and observations by means of which Boris Andreyitch hoped gradually to lead up to the real subject of the conversation. . . . In short, Boris Andreyitch, seeing that his hints were being thrown away, was compelled to approach the subject directly.

Several times he took breath as though pre-

paring to speak, stopped short and did not utter a word.

"Stepan Petrovitch," he began at last, "I intend to make you a proposal that will surprise you very much."

"Bra-oo, Bra-oo," Stepan Petrovitch replied calmly.

"A proposal which you do not expect in the least."

Stepan Petrovitch opened his eyes.

"Only please don't be angry with me. . . ."

Stepan Petrovitch's eyes opened more widely.

"I . . . I intend to ask you for the hand of your daughter, Vera Stepanovna."

Stepan Petrovitch got up quickly from his invalid chair.

"What?" he asked, in exactly the same voice and with the same expression of face as Verotchka.

Boris Andreyitch was compelled to repeat his proposal.

Stepan Petrovitch fixed his eyes on Vyazovnin and looked at him a long time in silence so that at last he felt awkward.

"Does Vera know?" Stepan Petrovitch asked.

"I have spoken to Vera Stepanovna and she has allowed me to address myself to you."

"Were you speaking to her just now?"

"Yes, just now."

"Wait a minute," Stepan Petrovitch articulated, and he went out.

Boris Andreyitch was left alone in the queer old man's study. In a state of stupor he gazed first at the walls and then at the floor, when suddenly there was a sound of horse's hoofs at the steps, the front door banged. A thick voice asked: "At home?"

Steps were heard and Mihey Miheyitch, already known to the reader, walked swaying into the study.

Boris Andreyitch was ready to die with vexation.

"How warm it is in here!" exclaimed Mihey Miheyitch, dropping onto the sofa.

"Ah, how do you do? And where's Stepan Petrovitch?"

"He's just gone out; he'll be back directly."

"It's awfully cold to-day," observed Mihey

Miheyitch, pouring himself out a glass of vodka. And, scarcely giving himself time to swallow it, he added briskly:

"I've come from the town again, you know."

"From the town?" repeated Vyazovnin, concealing his emotion with difficulty.

"From the town," repeated Mihey Miheyitch, "and all thanks to that brigand Onufry. Only fancy, he told me no end of tales, held out such alluring prospects that it made one's mouth water! 'I have found an investment for you,' says he, 'like nothing else in the world. You've simply to rake the shekels in by hundreds,—and the whole thing ended in his borrowing twenty-five roubles from me and my dragging myself off to the town for nothing. I quite knocked up my horses."

"You don't say so," muttered Vyazovnin.

"I tell you he's a brigand, a brigand, if ever there was one. He might as well be a highwayman with a bludgeon. I really don't know what the police are about. If he goes on like this, he will leave me without a half-penny, upon my soul!"

Stepan Petrovitch came into the room.

Mihey Miheyitch began describing his adventures with Onufry.

"And why is it somebody doesn't give him a good hiding?" he exclaimed.

"Doesn't give him a hiding!" repeated Stepan Petrovitch, and he suddenly went off into a peal of laughter. Mihey Miheyitch laughed too, looking at him and even repeating "Precisely, he ought to have a good hiding." But when Stepan Petrovitch fell on the sofa in paroxysms of hysterical laughter, Mihey Miheyitch turned to Boris Andreyitch and turning up the palms of his hands, commented: "There, he is always like that: bursts out laughing, the Lord only knows what at. That's his whimsy!"

Verotchka came in looking agitated and with red eyes.

"Papa's not quite well to-day," she observed in an undertone to Mihey Miheyitch.

Mihey Miheyitch nodded and put a piece of cheese into his mouth. At last Stepan Petrovitch left off laughing, got up, heaved a sigh and began walking about the room.

Boris Andreyitch avoided his eyes and sat

as though on thorns. Mihey Miheyitch fell to abusing Onufry Ilyitch again.

They had dinner; at dinner, too, Mihey Miheyitch was the only one who talked; it was almost evening when Stepan Petrovitch took Boris Andreyitch by the arm and drew him into the other room.

"You are a good man?" he asked, looking into his face.

"I am an honest man, Stepan Petrovitch," replied Boris Andreyitch, "that I can answer for,—and I love your daughter."

"You love her? Really?"

"I love her and will try to deserve her love."

"You won't get tired of her?" Stepan Petrovitch asked again.

"Never."

Stepan Petrovitch's face contracted with a look of pain.

"Well . . . mind . . . love her . . . I consent."

Boris Andreyitch would have embraced him but he said: "Afterwards . . . that's all right," and turning away he moved to the wall. Boris Andreyitch could see that he was crying.

Stepan Petrovitch wiped his eyes without turning round, then went back to the study, passing Boris Andreyitch, and, without looking at him, said with his habitual smile:

"Please, no more to-day . . . to-morrow . . . all . . . that's necessary. . . ."

"Certainly, certainly," Boris Andreyitch hurriedly assured him, and following him into the study, exchanged a glance with Verotchka.

There was joy in his soul, but at the same time some disquietude. He could not remain longer at Stepan Petrovitch's in the society of Mihey Miheyitch; he felt he must be alone—besides, he longed to tell Pyotr Vassilyitch. He went away promising to come back next day. As he said good-bye to Verotchka he kissed her hand. She looked at him.

"Till to-morrow," he said to her.

"Good-bye," she answered softly.

"Do you know, Pyotr Vassilyitch," Boris Andreyitch said when he had finished his story and was pacing up and down his friend's bedroom: "What I think is that a young man often doesn't marry because he thinks it dreadful to put his life into bondage; he thinks, 'Why

should I be in a hurry?—I've plenty of time, perhaps I may find something better,' and the business usually ends in his being a lonely old bachelor or marrying the first woman he comes across. It's all due to pride and egoism. If God has sent you a sweet, good girl, don't lose your chance; be happy and don't be too particular. I shall not find a wife better than Verotchka; and if she is somewhat deficient in regard to education it will be my work to look after that. She has rather a phlegmatic character, but that's no harm, quite the contrary. That's why I decided so quickly. And if I have made a mistake—" he added, and stopped short; after thinking a little, he went on: "there's no great harm done. Nothing would have come of my life anyway." Pyotr Vassilyitch listened to his friend in silence, from time to time sipping from a cracked glass the very nasty tea prepared by the zealous Makedonia.

"Why don't you speak?" Boris Andreyitch asked him at last, coming to a standstill before him. "What I say is right, isn't it? You agree with me, don't you?"

"The proposal has been made," Pyotr Vassilyitch rejoined emphatically. "The father has given his blessing, the daughter has not refused you, so it's no use discussing it further. Perhaps it really is for the best. Now it's the wedding we must think about, not discussing its wisdom; but morning brings good counsel; we will talk it over properly to-morrow.

"Hey! Boy there! Take Boris Andreyitch down."

"You might at least embrace me and congratulate me," said Boris Andreyitch. "What a fellow you are, really!"

"Embrace you I certainly will, with pleasure." And Pyotr Vassilyitch embraced Boris Andreyitch. "God give you all earthly happiness!"

The friends parted.

"It's all because," Pyotr Vassilyitch said aloud to himself, after lying for some time in bed and tossing from side to side, "it's all because he has not served in the army! He has grown used to indulging his whims and knows nothing of discipline."

A month later Vyazovnin married Verotchka. He insisted that the wedding should not be put off longer. Pyotr Vassilyitch was his best man. During that month Vyazovnin went often to Stepan Petrovitch's; but no change was perceptible in his behaviour to Verotchka and her behaviour to him; she was a little more reserved with him, that was all. He brought her "Yurey Miloslavsky" and read aloud some chapters. She liked Zagoskin's novel, but when it was finished she did not ask for another. Karantyev came once to have a look at Verotchka, since she had become engaged to another man, and it must be admitted that he came drunk; he kept gazing at her as though he were going to say something but said nothing.

He was asked to sing. He sang some disconsolate ditty, then burst into a gay and reckless one, flung down the guitar on the sofa, said good-bye to everyone and, getting into his sledge, flung himself face downwards on the hay strewn in it, burst into sobs and a quarter of an hour later was sleeping the sleep of the dead.

The day before the wedding Verotchka was very sad and Stepan Petrovitch was low-spirited too. He had hoped that Boris Andreyitch would consent to come and live with him. The latter, however, had not hinted at this, but on the contrary had suggested that Stepan Petrovitch might stay for a time at Vyazovno.

The old man had refused; he was used to his study.

Verotchka promised to visit him at least once a week. How mournfully her father answered her: "Bra-oo, Bra-oo!"

So Boris Andreyitch began his life as a married man. Verotchka, being an excellent housekeeper, put his whole house in order. He admired her noiseless but careful activity, her mild always serene rule, called her "his little Dutchwoman" and was continually repeating to Pyotr Vassilyitch that he had never before known what happiness was. It must be observed that, from the wedding day onwards, Pyotr Vassilyitch gave up visiting him so often and staying so long, though Boris Andreyitch received him as warmly as ever and though Verotchka had a genuine affection for him.

"Your life is not the same now," he would say to Vyazovnin when the latter reproached him affectionately for having grown colder to him. "You're a married man; I'm a bachelor. I may be in your way."

At first Vyazovnin did not contradict him; but by degrees he began to notice that he was dull at times without his friend. His wife did not restrict his liberty in the least; on the contrary he sometimes forgot about her altogether and for whole mornings at a stretch would not say a single word to her, though he always looked into her face with pleasure and tenderness, though every time she passed by him with her light step he would catch her hand and kiss it, which invariably drew a smile to her lips—the smile was the same that he had so loved; but is a smile alone enough?

They had too little in common and he began to be aware of it.

"There's no denying that my wife has very few resources," thought Boris Andreyitch one day, as he sat with folded arms on the sofa.

The words Verotchka had said to him on the

day of his proposal: "I am not a match for you," echoed in his heart.

"If I had been a German or a savant," he pursued his reflections, "or if I had had some constant occupation which would have engrossed the greater part of my time, such a wife would have been a godsend, but as it is! Can I have made a mistake?" . . . This last thought was more acutely painful to him than he had expected.

When that same morning Pyotr Vassilyitch repeated that he could not but be in his way, Boris Andreyitch could not restrain himself and exclaimed: "Upon my word, you're not in the least in our way; on the contrary, when you are here we are both ever so much more lively"—he had almost said more at ease, and it was certainly true.

Boris Andreyitch chatted eagerly to Pyotr Vassilyitch exactly as he had done before his marriage; and Verotchka could talk to him too, while for her husband she felt a great respect, and, with all her unmistakable devotion to him, did not know what to say to him, how to entertain him.

Besides, she saw that Pyotr Vassilyitch's presence enlivened him. It ended in Pyotr Vassilyitch becoming quite an indispensable person in the house. He loved Verotchka as though she were his daughter, and indeed no one could help loving so kind and good a creature. When Boris Andreyitch, with human weakness, confided to his friend his secret thoughts and grievances, Pyotr Vassilyitch blamed him severely for his ingratitude, enumerated all Verotchka's virtues, and once in answer to a remark of Boris Andreyitch's that he, Pyotr Vassilyitch, had thought that they were not made for each other, the latter answered angrily that he did not deserve her.

"I have found nothing in her," muttered Boris Andreyitch.

"Found nothing in her! Why, did you expect something extraordinary of her? You've found an excellent wife in her, let me tell you that!"

"That's true," Vyazovnin hastily assented.

Everything in the house went on as before —quietly and peacefully. For it was not only impossible to quarrel with Verotchka, no mis-

understandings even could exist between her and her husband, yet the inner rift was felt in everything. So the effect of an unseen internal wound may be seen in a man's whole being. Verotchka had not the habit of complaining; besides she did not even in thought blame Vyazovnin for anything, and it never entered his head that she was not properly satisfied with her life with him. Only two people clearly understood her position, her old father and Pyotr Vassilyitch.

Stepan Petrovitch caressed her with peculiar sympathetic compassion and looked into her eyes when she came to see him—he asked her no questions, but his sighs were more frequent as he walked up and down the room, and his "Bra-oo, Bra-oo" had no longer the note of the imperturbable calm of a spirit remote from all things earthly.

He seemed to have become pale and thin since he had been parted from his daughter. What was passing in her soul was no secret to Pyotr Vassilyitch either. Verotchka did not in the least expect her husband to pay attention to her or even to talk to her; but she was

fretted by the thought that she was a burden to him.

Pyotr Vassilyitch found her one day standing motionless with her face to the wall. Like her father whom she greatly resembled, she did not like to display her tears, and turned aside when she wept, even if she were alone in the room. Pyotr Vassilyitch walked softly by her, and never dropped the slightest hint that could give her ground for supposing that he knew why she was standing with her face to the wall. But he gave Vyazovnin no peace; he did not, it is true, utter those offensively irritating, unnecessary words, "I told you so!" —words which, let us observe in parenthesis, the best of people cannot refrain from uttering even in the moment of warmest sympathy. But he attacked Boris Andreyitch mercilessly for his indifference and ennui and once affected him so much that he ran to Verotchka and began anxiously scrutinising and questioning her. She looked at him so gently and answered him so calmly that he went away inwardly troubled by Pyotr Vassilyitch's reproaches, but thank-

ful that Verotchka anyway suspected nothing. . . .

So passed the winter.

Such relations cannot last long; they either end in a rupture or undergo a change, rarely for the better. . . .

Boris Andreyitch did not become irritable and exacting as is often the case with people who feel they are in the wrong; he did not permit himself the cheap and often, even in intelligent people, coarse pleasure of mockery and gibing; he did not sink into melancholy; he simply began to be absorbed by the thought of how to get away,—for a time, of course.

"To travel!" he repeated to himself as he got up in the morning. "To travel!" he whispered as he got into bed.

He found an enchanting fascination lay hid in those words. He tried by way of distraction visiting Sofya Kirillovna, but her fluent speech and her free-and-easy manners, her little smiles and airs and graces, seemed to him very mawkish. "What a contrast to Verotchka!" he thought, looking at the emanci-

pated widow, and yet the thought of getting away from Verotchka never left him. . . .

The breath of the coming spring—spring which beckons and allures the very birds from beyond the seas—dissipated his last doubts and set his head in a whirl. He went away to Petersburg on the pretext of some important business that could not be deferred, though it had till then never been mentioned. . . .

As he parted from Verotchka he suddenly felt a tightness and rush of blood at his heart: he felt sorry for his sweet, gentle wife; tears gushed from his eyes and bedewed her pale forehead, which he had only just touched with his lips.

"I shall soon—soon be back! And I shall write, my darling," he kept repeating.

And commending her to the care and affection of Pyotr Vassilyitch, he got into his carriage, touched and melancholy. . . .

His melancholy disappeared instantly at the sight of the first softly green willows on the high-road, which lay a mile and a half from his estate.

An unaccountable, almost boyish, rapture set

his heart throbbing; his chest heaved and he fastened his eyes greedily on the distance.

"No," he exclaimed: "I see that—

> "'The fiery steed and the gentle doe,
> Harnessed together, cannot go.'"

But was he a fiery steed?

Vera was left alone; but in the first place Pyotr Vassilyitch visited her frequently, and what was more her old father was induced to tear himself from his beloved abode and move for the time into his daughter's house.

The three of them got on capitally together; their tastes and their habits were so completely in harmony! And yet Vyazovnin was not forgotten by them,—on the contrary, he served them as an unseen spiritual tie. They were incessantly talking of him, of his cleverness, his goodness, his culture and the simple good nature of his behaviour. They seemed to have become even fonder of Boris Andreyitch in his absence from home. The weather set in fine; the days did not fly by,—no, they passed peacefully and joyfully like high, bright clouds on a blue and clear sky. Vyazovnin wrote from time to

time; his letters were read and re-read with great pleasure. In each of them he spoke of his approaching return. . . . At last one day Pyotr Vassilyitch received the following letter from him:

"Dear Friend, my dear kind Pyotr Vassilyitch: I have been wondering a long while how to begin this letter, but it seems that the best way is to tell you straight out that I am going abroad. The news I know will surprise you and even make you angry: you could not have expected this,—and you will be perfectly right if you call me an irresponsible and unreasonable person; I do not mean, indeed, to defend myself and even at this moment I am conscious that I am blushing, but have the patience to hear me out. In the first place, I am going for a very short time and in such society and such favourable conditions as you can hardly imagine; and in the second, I am firmly convinced that after playing the fool for the last time, after satisfying for the last time my passion for seeing everything and having every experience, I shall become an excellent husband, and a stay-at-home family man,

and shall show that I know how to value the undeserved kindness of destiny in presenting me with such a wife as Verotchka.

"Please persuade her of this too, and show her this letter. I am not writing to her now; I have not the courage:—but I shall certainly write from Stettin for which our steamer is bound, and meanwhile tell her that I am on my knees before her and humbly beg her not to be cross with her stupid husband. Knowing her angelic character, I am certain she will forgive me and I swear by everything in the world that in three months, not a day later, I will be back at Vyazovno and then no force shall drag me away till the end of my days. Goodbye or rather till we meet soon; I embrace you and kiss the sweet hands of my Verotchka.

"I shall write to you from Stettin where you can send me letters. If anything unforeseen should happen, and in regard to the management of the place generally, I rely upon you as upon a wall of stone.

"Your Boris Vyazovnin.

"P. S.—Have my study repapered for the autumn. . . . Do you hear? . . . Be sure to."

Alas, the hopes expressed by Boris Andreyitch in this letter were not destined to be fulfilled.

Owing to the great number of impressions he received and things he had to do, he had not time to write to Verotchka from Stettin; but from Hamburg he sent her a letter in which he informed her of his intention to visit —for the sake of inspecting certain industrial institutions and also listening to certain necessary lectures—Paris, where he begged her to forward letters, Poste Restante.

Vyazovnin arrived in Paris in the morning and, after in the course of the day running through the Boulevards, the Tuileries, the Place de la Concorde and the Palais Royal, and even ascending the Vendôme Column, he dined at Véfeur's with the dignified air of an habitué, and in the evening visited the Château des Fleurs—to see, as a disinterested observer, what the "can-can" really was like and how the Parisians danced it. The dance itself Vyazovnin did not think attractive; but one of the *Parisiennes* performing the can-can, a lively, well-made brunette with a turned-up nose and

saucy eyes, did attract him. He came to a standstill near her more and more frequently, exchanged at first glances with her, then smiles, then words. . . . Half an hour later she was walking arm in arm with him telling him *"son petit nom"*—Julie,—and hinting that she was hungry and that nothing could be better than a supper at the Maison d'Or *"dans un petit cabinet particulier."*

Boris Andreyitch was not at all hungry himself, and indeed supper in the society of Mdlle. Julie had not entered into his calculations. . . . "However, if that's the way here," he thought, "I suppose I shall have to go—*Partons,"* he said aloud,—but at the same instant someone trod very heavily on his foot. He cried out, turned round and saw facing him a thick-set, broad-shouldered, middle-aged gentleman in a stiff cravat in the frock-coat of a civilian buttoned all the way up and full trousers of military cut.

Pulling his hat right down to his nose from under which his dyed moustaches fell in two little cascades, and bulging out his trousers pockets with the big fingers of his hairy hands,

this gentleman, by every token an infantry officer, stared stubbornly at Vyazovnin. The expression of his yellow eyes, of his rough, flat cheeks, of his bluish, prominent jaws, of his whole face, was coarse and insolent.

"Was it *you* trod on my foot?" said Vyazovnin.

"Oui, Monsieur."

"But in such cases . . . people apologise."

"And if I won't apologise to you, *Monsieur le Moscovite."* Parisians recognise Russians at once.

"Then did you wish to insult me?" asked Vyazovnin.

"Oui, Monsieur. . . . I don't like the shape of your nose."

"Fi. . . . *Le gros jaloux,"* murmured Mdlle. Julie, to whom the infantry officer was evidently not a stranger.

"But then . . ." Vyazovnin began, as though bewildered.

"Then we must fight," the officer caught him up. "Of course. Very good. Here is my card."

"And here is mine," answered Vyazovnin,

still bewildered and as though in a dream with a confused throbbing of his heart, he scribbled on the polished paper of his visiting card with a little gold pencil he had just bought for his watch chain, *Hotel des Trois Monarques No. 46.*

The officer nodded and announced that he would have the honour of sending his seconds to *"Monsieur . . . Monsieur . . ."* he raised Vyazovnin's card to his right eye, *"Monsieur de Vazavononin"* and turned his back on Boris Andreyitch, who at once left the *Château des Fleurs.* Mdlle. Julie tried to detain him but he looked at her very coldly . . . she promptly turned away from him, and was for a long time afterwards sitting by the wall, explaining something to the angry officer, who as before kept his hands in his trousers pockets—and did not smile.

On getting into the street, Vyazovnin stopped under the first gas lamp he came to and for a second time and with great attention read the card that had been handed him.

On it stood the following words:

Alexandre Lebœuf, capitaine en second au 83me de Ligne.

"Is it possible that this can lead to anything?" he thought to himself. "Can I really be going to fight a duel? And what for? And on the very day after my arrival in Paris! What folly!"

He began a letter to Verotchka, to Pyotr Vassilyitch and at once tore up the pages he had begun and flung them away.

"Nonsense! It's a farce!" he repeated, and went to bed.

But his thoughts took a different turn when next morning at breakfast two gentlemen very much like Monsieur Lebœuf, only younger (all French infantry officers have the same face) called upon him and announcing their names (one was called Monsieur LeCoq, the other Monsieur Pinochet, both were lieutenants *"au 83me de Ligne"*) introduced themselves to Boris Andreyitch as the seconds *"de notre ami Monsieur Lebœuf"* sent by him to take all necessary steps since their friend Monsieur Lebœuf would accept no apologies.

Vyazovnin was obliged to inform *Messieurs les officiers,* the friends of Monsieur Lebœuf, that being a complete novice in Paris he had not yet had time to look round and provide himself with a second; ("I suppose one is enough?" he added; "Quite enough, responded Monsieur Pinochet), and therefore he would have to ask *Messieurs les officiers* to let him have four hours to find one.

Messieurs les officiers exchanged glances, shrugged their shoulders, consented, however, and got up from their seats.

"Si Monsieur le desire," Monsieur Pinochet brought out suddenly, stopping short before the door (of the two seconds he was obviously the readier with his tongue and he had been commissioned to carry on the negotiations, Monsieur LeCoq merely grunted approvingly), *"Si Monsieur le desire,"* he repeated (Vyazovnin was reminded of Monsieur Galisi, his Moscow barber, who often made use of that phrase), "we can recommend one of the officers of our regiment, le lieutenant Barbichon, *un garçon très dévoué,* who would certainly consent to do a service à un gentleman (Mon-

sieur Pinochet pronounced this word as if it were French), to help him out of a difficulty, and if he becomes your second he will take your interests to heart—*prendre à cœur vos intérêts.*"

Vyazovnin was at first amazed at such a proposal, but reflecting that he knew no one in Paris, thanked Monsieur Pinochet and said he would expect Monsieur Barbichon—and Monsieur Barbichon was not slow in making his appearance. This *garçon très dévoué* turned out to be an extremely alert and active person, declaring that "*cet animal de Lebœuf n'en fait jamais d'autres . . . c'est un Othello, Monsieur, un véritable Othello.*" He asked Vyazovnin: "*N'est-ce pas que vous désirez que l'affaire soit sérieuse?*" And, without waiting for an answer, exclaimed:

"*C'est tout ce que je désirais savoir. Laissez moi faire!*" And he did in fact conduct the affair with such energy, and took Vyazovnin's interests to heart with such warmth, that four hours later poor Boris Andreyitch, who had no notion of fencing, was standing in the very middle of a green glade in the Bois de Vin-

cennes with his coat off and the sleeves of his shirt tucked up, with a sword in his hand two paces from his opponent. Bright sunshine lighted up the scene. Vyazovnin had no clear idea of how he had come there: he kept repeating to himself: "How stupid it is! How stupid it is!" And he felt ashamed as though he were taking part in some dull, practical joke, —and an awkward, inwardly hidden grin played about his soul while his eyes were rivetted on the low brow and the cropped black hair of the Frenchman who stood before him.

"Toutest prêt," a lisping voice announced, *"Allez,"* piped another.

Monsieur Lebœuf's face assumed an expression not so much ferocious as predatory; Vyazovnin flourished his sword (Pinochet had assured him that his ignorance of the art of fencing gave him *"de grands avantages!"*) when all at once something extraordinary happened. There was a rattle, a stamp, a flash— Vyazovnin felt in his chest on the right side the presence of a sort of cold big stick. He wanted to push it away, to say "Don't," but he was already lying on his back and experi-

encing a strange almost absurd sensation as though they were trying to pull teeth out of his whole body. . . . Then the earth began softly heaving under him. . . . A voice said: *"Tout c'est passé dans les règles, n'est-ce pas, Messieurs?"* A second answered, *"Oh, parfaitement."* And crash! Everything seemed to fly round and then sank into the earth.

"Verotchka!" Vyazovnin hardly had time to think with anguish. . . .

Towards evening the *garçon très dévoué* brought him to the hotel des trois Monarques. He died in the night. He passed away to that land from which no traveller has yet returned. He did not regain consciousness before his death and only muttered twice: "I'll go back directly . . . it's nothing . . . to the country now. . . ." The Russian priest for whom the hotel-keeper sent gave information of all this to the Russian embassy—and two days later the "unhappy affair with a Russian visitor" was in all the newspapers.

It had been a hard and bitter task for Pyotr Vassilyitch to tell Verotchka of her husband's letter; but when the news of Vyazovnin's death

reached him, he was utterly distracted. The first to read of it in the papers was Mihey Miheyitch, and he at once galloped off to Pyotr Vassilyitch, accompanied by Onufry Ilyitch with whom he had again made friends. As people usually do, he began shouting as soon as he got into the hall: "Only fancy! What a disaster!" and so on.

For a long while Pyotr Vassilyitch would not believe him, but when no possibility of doubt was left him, he waited a whole day, then set off at last to Verotchka.

The mere sight of him, crushed and broken, so alarmed her that she could scarcely stand on her feet.

He tried to prepare her for the fatal news but his strength failed him; he sat down and through his tears faltered: "He is dead, he is dead. . . ."

A year has passed. From the roots of the felled tree new shoots spring up, the deepest wound is healed in time, life replaces death even as it is replaced by it,—and Verotchka's

heart had gradually grown easier and begun to heal.

Moreover Vyazovnin did not belong to the number of people who are irreplaceable. (And indeed are there such people?) Nor was Verotchka capable of devoting herself for ever to one feeling. (And indeed are there such feelings?)

She had married Vyazovnin without constraint and without great enthusiasm. She had been faithful and devoted to him, but she had not been entirely absorbed in him. She grieved for him genuinely, but not frantically. What more would you have?

Pyotr Vassilyitch did not give up coming to see her; he was as before her closest friend, and so it was not at all surprising that, being left one day alone with her, he looked into her face and very quietly suggested that she should be his wife. . . .

She smiled in answer and held out her hand to him. Their life after their marriage went on much as before. There was no need to change it.

Ten years have passed since then.

Old Barsukov is living with them and grows younger every year. He is never many steps apart from his grandchildren, of which there are three already; two girls and a boy. He even talks to them, especially to his favourite, the dark-eyed, curly-headed boy who has been named in his honour Stepan. The little rogue is very well aware that his grandfather adores him and so ventures upon mimicking how he walks about the room exclaiming "Bra-oo, Bra-oo." This bit of mischief always excites the greatest merriment in the house. Poor Vyazovnin is not forgotten to this day. Pyotr Vassilyitch honours his memory, always speaks of him with peculiar feeling and at every opportunity is sure to say that the dear fellow was fond of this, or had the habit of doing that. Pyotr Vassilyitch, his wife and all his household lead a very monotonous life, quiet and peaceful; they are happy . . . for there is no other happiness on earth.

1853.

FATHER ALEXEY'S STORY

FATHER ALEXEY'S STORY

. . . TWENTY years ago it was my lot to make an unofficial tour of inspection of the rather numerous estates belonging to my aunt. The parish priests, with whom I considered it my duty to make acquaintance, turned out all to be rather alike and seemed as though they had all been made on the same pattern, but finally, in almost the last estate that I inspected, I found a priest who was unlike the others. He was a very old, almost decrepit man, and had it not been for the earnest entreaties of his parishioners who loved and respected him, he would long before have asked to be relieved of his duties. I was struck by two peculiarities in Father Alexey (that was the priest's name). To begin with, he not merely refrained from asking anything for himself but declared in so many words that he needed nothing; and in the second place, I had never seen

in any human face such a look of sadness and complete detachment—such a look of being utterly "broken," as it is called. The features of his face were of the ordinary country type; a wrinkled forehead, little grey eyes, a thick nose, a wedge-shaped beard, a swarthy, sunburnt skin. But the expression, the expression! There was but a faint melancholy glimmer of life in his lustreless eyes; his voice, too, seemed colourless and scarcely living. I was taken ill and laid up for a few days; Father Alexey used to come and see me in the evenings—not to talk but to play a game of cards called "fools." Playing cards seemed to entertain him even more than me. One evening after having been made "the fool" several times in succession, at which Father Alexey was much gratified, I began talking of his past life, of the troubles which had left on him such unmistakable traces. Father Alexey held back for a long time, but ended by telling me his story. He must have taken a liking to me or he would not have been so open with me.

I will try and repeat his story in his own words. Father Alexey spoke very simply and

clearly, without any clerical or provincial mannerisms or phrases. I have observed more than once that Russians of all classes who have gone through a great deal and have learned resignation express themselves just in that language.

. . . I had a good and sensible wife (was how he began); I loved her from my heart and we had eight children, but almost all of them died when they were little. One of my sons became a bishop and died not long ago in his diocese; about my other son, Yakov, I am going to tell you now. I sent him to the seminary in the town of T. and soon began receiving the most gratifying reports of him: he was the top of his class in all the subjects! At home as a child he had been remarkable for his studiousness and modesty; sometimes you would hear nothing of him all day . . . he would be sitting at his book, reading. He never caused his mother or me the slightest annoyance; he was always a good boy. Only sometimes he was too thoughtful for his age, his health was frail. One day something strange

happened to him. He was ten years old at the time. He left home at dawn—it was the eve of St. Peter's day—and was away almost the whole morning. At last he came back. My wife and I asked him where he had been. "I went for a walk in the forest," he told us, "and there I met a little green old man who talked to me a great deal and gave me such delicious nuts."

"What little green old man?" we asked him.

"I don't know," he said; "I have never seen him before. He is a little hunchbacked old man, he keeps laughing and his feet are never still—and he is green as a leaf all over."

"What?" we said; "was his face green too?"

"Yes, his face, and his hair and even his eyes."

Our son had never told a lie, but this time my wife and I were doubtful.

"You must have fallen asleep in the forest in the heat and dreamed of the old man."

"I didn't go to sleep, not a wink," he said. "Why, don't you believe me? Why, I have one of the nuts left in my pocket."

Yakov took the nut out of his pocket and

showed it us. It had a small kernel something like a chestnut with a rough skin; it was not like our ordinary nuts. I put it away, I wanted to show it to the doctor . . . but it was lost, I could not find it afterwards.

Well, we sent him to the seminary, and, as I have told you already, he delighted us with his success. So my wife and I expected he would turn out well. When he came home for his holidays it was a pleasure to look at him: there was so much goodness in his face and there was no fault you could find with him. Only he was thin and there was no proper colour in his face. Well, he reached his nineteenth year and his studies were nearly over. And all at once we got a letter from him. He wrote to us, "Father and mother, do not be angry with me, allow me to take up a secular calling, my heart is not in the vocation of a priest, I am terrified of the responsibility, I am afraid of sin—doubts have begun to stir in me! Without your parental permission and blessing I shall not venture on anything; but I will tell you one thing: I am afraid of myself, for I have begun to think a great deal."

I must tell you, sir, I was terribly grieved at this letter; it was like a stab in the heart, for I saw I should not have anyone to take my place after me. My elder son was a monk, and this one wanted to leave the priesthood altogether. It was a grief to me, too, because for nearly two hundred years the priests in this parish have been of our family! However, I thought it was no use kicking against the pricks; it seemed that this was ordained for him. What sort of pastor would he make if he had let doubts assail him! I took council with my wife and I wrote to him in this sense: "Yakov, my son, think it over well, measure ten times before you cut once; there are great difficulties in a secular calling, cold and hunger and contempt for our class! And you must understand that no one will give you a helping hand; mind you don't repent too late! My desire, as you know, has always been that you should succeed me here; but if you really doubt of your vocation and your faith has been shaken—it is not for me to try and compel you. God's will be done! Your mother and I do not refuse you our blessing."

Yakov answered me with a grateful letter. "You have relieved me, father," he wrote; "it is my intention to devote myself to a learned career—and I have help promised me; I shall enter the University and become a doctor, for I feel a great inclination for science." I read Yasha's letter and was more grieved than ever; and soon I had no one to share my sorrow: my old wife caught cold about that time and died—whether of the cold or because the Lord took her in His mercy, I cannot tell. I wept and wept in my solitary bereavement—but there was no help for it. So it was to be, it seems. I should have been glad to be under the soil too . . . but the earth was hard . . . it would not open. And I was expecting my son, for he sent me word 'before I go to Moscow I shall come home to see you.' And he did indeed come home, but he did not stay long. Something seemed urging him on; it seemed as though he longed to fly to Moscow, to his beloved University! I began questioning him about his doubts and asked him what was the reason of them, but I could not get much talk out of him: his mind was pos-

sessed by one idea—and that was all! I want to help my fellow creatures, he said. Well, he went away—he scarcely took a farthing with him—nothing but a few clothes. He had great confidence in himself! And not without good reason. He passed the examination brilliantly, became a student, got lessons in private families. . . . He was good at Greek and Latin. And, would you believe it, he actually sent me money. I felt a little more cheerful—not on account of the money, of course,—I sent it back to him and scolded him too; I was cheered because I saw he would do well. But my cheerfulness did not last long.

He came home for his first vacation. And—it was strange—I hardly knew my Yakov. He had become so depressed, so gloomy—there was no getting a word out of him. And his face was changed too—he looked almost ten years older. He had always been of a retiring disposition, that's true; the least thing, and he would be shy and blushing like a girl. . . . But if he raised his eyes you could see that his soul was serene. Now it was not the same thing, though. He was not shy but like some

wild creature, like a wolf, and he looked at everyone from under his brows. Not a smile, not a greeting, like a stone! When I tried to question him he would either say nothing or growl at me. I began to wonder whether—God forbid—he had taken to drinking, or whether he had given way to gambling—or whether he had got into some trouble through weakness in regard to women. In youth the spell of love is potent and there are sure to be bad examples and temptations in a big town like Moscow.

But no, there was nothing of the sort to be seen. He drank nothing but water or kvass; had no eyes for the fair sex—and had nothing to do with people in general. And what was bitterer than anything, he no longer put the same confidence in me, he seemed indifferent, as though he was sick of everything belonging to him. I would turn the conversation on his studies, on the University, but I could get no real answer out of him. He would go to church but there was something strange about that too: everywhere else he was morose and sullen but in church he looked as though he were grin-

ning all the time. He spent six weeks with me like that and went back to Moscow again. He wrote to me twice from Moscow—and it seemed to me from his letters as though he were coming to himself again. But picture my amazement, sir! Suddenly in the very depth of winter, just before Christmas, he came home. How? Why? In what way? I knew that there was no vacation at that time.

"Have you come from Moscow?" I asked.

"Yes."

"And how . . . about the University?"

"I have given up the University."

"Given it up?"

"Yes."

"For good?"

"Yes, for good."

"Are you ill then, or what, Yakov?"

"No, father," he said, "I am not ill; only don't worry me with your questions, father, or I shall go away from here and you will never see me again."

Yakov said he was not ill but I was horrified at the look of his face. His cheeks were drawn so that the bones struck out, he was all skin

and bones, his voice had a hollow note like a barrel, and his eyes . . . good God, what eyes! Fierce, wild, continually roving so that you could never catch them; his brows were knit, his lips, too, seemed twisted on one side. . . . What had become of my beloved Joseph, my gentle boy? I couldn't imagine. Is he out of his mind? I wondered. He wandered about like an uneasy spirit, did not sleep at night and all of a sudden would stare into a corner and seem to grow stiff with terror. . . . It was uncanny! Though he did threaten me that he would not stay if I asked him questions, yet I was his father. My last hope was being shattered and was I to keep silent? One day, choosing my time, I began imploring Yakov with tears, entreating him for the sake of his mother, "Tell me, your father in flesh and in spirit, Yasha, what is wrong with you? Don't destroy me, explain, open your heart! Have you slain some Christian soul, perhaps? Then repent!"

"Well, father," he said all at once (it was in the evening), "you have touched my heart; I

will tell you the whole truth! I have hurt no other soul, but my own is being lost."

"In what way?"

"It's like this . . ."—and Yakov raised his eyes to me for the first time—"for the last four months," he began, but all at once his voice broke and he began breathing hard.

"What is it for the last four months? Tell me, don't torture me."

"For the last four months I have been seeing him."

"*Him!* What him?"

"Why, him, whose name one can't utter at night."

I turned cold all over and began to tremble.

"What?" I said, "do you see *him?*"

"Yes."

"And do you see him now?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

And I did not dare to turn round myself, and we both spoke in a whisper.

"Over there," he said, and showed me with his eyes, "over there, in the corner."

I plucked up my spirit and looked into the corner; there was nothing there!

"But there's nothing there, Yakov, really!"

"You don't see him, but I do."

I looked again—again there was nothing. I suddenly thought of the little old man in the wood who gave him the nut.

"What is he like?" I said. "Green?"

"No, not green—black."

"With horns?"

"No, he is like a man, but all black."

As Yakov spoke, his mouth was twisted so that his teeth showed; he was pale as death and he huddled up to me in terror; his eyes seemed as though they were starting out of his head but he still looked into the corner.

"That's the shadow makes you fancy it," I said; "it's the blackness of the shadow and you take it for a human form."

"Not at all! I see his eyes; there, he is showing the whites of his eyes, there, he is lifting his hands and beckoning."

"Yakov, Yakov, you should try and pray; it would break the spell. Let the Lord arise and His enemies be scattered!"

"I have tried," he said, "but it is no use."

"Wait, wait, Yakov, don't be faint-hearted; I will burn incense, I will say a prayer, I will sprinkle holy water around you."

Yakov merely waved his hand in despair.

"I don't believe in your incense nor in your holy water; they are not a hap'orth of use to me now. There's no parting from *him* for me now. Since he came to me one cursed day in summer he has been my constant visitor and there is no getting rid of him. Understand that, father, and don't be surprised at my behaviour—and don't torment me."

"What day did he come to you?" I asked, and I kept making the sign of the cross over him. "Was it when you were writing to me about your doubts?"

Yakov put aside my hand.

"Leave me alone, father," he said, "don't make me angry, for fear worse may happen. I am not far from laying hands on myself."

You can imagine, sir, what it was for me to hear that! I remember I cried all night. How have I deserved the wrath of God? I wondered.

Here Father Alexey took a check handker-

chief out of his pocket, blew his nose and stealthily wiped his eyes.

"A sad life we had after that!" he went on. "My mind was full of nothing else but the dread that he should run away or—God forbid —do himself some mischief. I kept watch over every step he took but I was afraid of talking to him.

"At that time there was living near us a lady, the widow of a colonel, called Marfa Savvishna. I had a great respect for her, for she was a gentle and sensible woman, though she was young and of prepossessing appearance. I used to visit her often and she did not despise me for being a priest. In my grief and misery, not knowing what to do, I went and told her all about it. At first she was horrified and quite overwhelmed; and then she began to think. For a long time she sat silent; and then she expressed a desire to see my son and talk to him. And I felt at once that I must do as she wished, for it was no feminine curiosity that prompted her request, but something else. When I got home I began persuading Yakov "Come with me to see the colonel's lady." He

wouldn't hear of it. "I won't," he said, "nothing would induce me! What could I talk to her about?" He even shouted at me. However, I succeeded in persuading him at last and, putting the horse in the sledge, I took him to Marfa Savvishna and, as arranged, left him alone with her. I was surprised myself that he had agreed so soon. "Never mind, we shall see what comes of it," I thought. Three or four hours later my Yakov came back.

"Well," I asked him, "how did you like our neighbour?"

He made no answer. I tried again. "She is a virtuous lady," I said, "I suppose she was kind to you?"

"Yes," he said, "she is not like other people." I saw he seemed to be softer, and I ventured to ask him about his affliction. The look in Yakov's eye was like the lash of a whip—and again he said nothing. I did not trouble him further and went out of the room; an hour later I went to the door, looked through the key-hole—and what do you think? My Yakov was asleep. He was lying asleep on his bed. I crossed myself several times. May God shower

every blessing upon Marfa Savvishna! I thought. So the dear woman had succeeded in touching his hardened heart!

Next day I saw Yakov take his cap. I thought of asking where he was going, but no —better not ask . . . no doubt it is to her! And it really was to Marfa Savvishna that Yakov went, and he stayed longer still; and the next day he went again, and then a day later—again! My spirit began to revive for I saw a change in my son—his face was different and one could look into his eyes—he did not turn away. His depression was still there, but the despair, the horror had gone. But I had hardly begun to be more hopeful when everything was shattered again. Yakov became like a wild creature again, there was no going near him. He sat shut up all day in his room and went no more to the colonel's widow. Had he offended her in some way, I wondered, and had she forbidden him the house? But no, I thought; though he is afflicted he would not venture on that, and, besides, she is not that sort of woman. I could not refrain from asking him at last:

"What about our neighbour, Yakov? You seem to have quite forgotten her."

And he positively shouted at me:

"Our neighbour? Do you want *him* to laugh at me?"

"What?" I said.

But he clenched his fists and was quite savage.

"Yes," he said, "he used only to stand there but now he has taken to laughing and grinning! Get away, go!"

To whom he addressed those words, I don't know; I could hardly stagger out of the room, I was so frightened. Only imagine; his face was as red as copper, he was foaming at the mouth, his voice was hoarse as though someone was suffocating him! I went off, feeling utterly desolate, to Marfa Savvishna that very day . . . I found her in great distress. Her very appearance was changed; she was thinner in the face. But she would not talk to me about my son. She only said one thing, that no human help could be of any avail. "You must pray, father." And then she gave me a hundred roubles for the poor and sick of my parish, and

again repeated "pray." My God, as though I did not pray day and night as it was!

Father Alexey took out his handkerchief again and wiped away his tears, this time openly; after a brief pause he went on with his sad story.

After that we went from bad to worse, like a snowball rolling down hill; we could see there was a precipice at the bottom, but we could not stop ourselves. And there was no concealing it; there was great commotion in the whole parish because the priest's son was possessed by the devil. People said that the authorities ought to be informed of it. And they would have informed them, no doubt, but my parishioners—God bless them for it—were sorry for me. Meanwhile the winter was over and spring had come. And the Lord sent us such a beautiful fine spring as even the old people did not remember: the sun shone all day, it was warm and still. And a happy thought came to me, to persuade Yakov to go with me on a pilgrimage to St. Mitrofany's at Voronezh. "If that last resource is of no avail," I thought, "then the only hope is the grave."

Well, I was sitting one evening on the steps of the porch; there was a glow of sunset in the sky, the larks were singing, the apple blossom was out, the grass was green. . . . I sat and wondered how to tell Yakov of my plan. All at once I saw him coming out on to the steps; he stood and looked, heaved a sigh and squatted on the step beside me. I was quite frightened with joy but I did not say a word. And he sat, looked at the sunset and was silent too. And it seemed to me as though he were in a softened mood. The wrinkles were smoothed on his forehead, even his eyes were clearer . . . it looked as though tears were almost coming into them. Seeing such a change in him, I confess I grew bolder. "Yakov," I said, "hear what I have to say and don't be angry." And I told him of my plan of how we should go on foot together to St. Mitrofany's—it was about a hundred miles from us to Voronezh—and how pleasant it would be for the two of us getting up before the sunrise to go on and on, in the cool of the spring through the green grass in the high-road; and I told him that if we fall down and pray at

the shrine of the saint, perhaps—who knows—the Lord God may have mercy on us and he may be healed, of which there have been many examples. And imagine my happiness, sir!

"Very good," said Yakov, and he did turn round but kept looking at the sky. "I agree. Let us go."

I was overwhelmed. "My dear," I said, "my darling, thank you!" He asked me:

"When are we going?"

"To-morrow if you like," I said.

So next day we set off. We put wallets on our backs, took staves in our hands and started. We walked for seven whole days; and all the time the weather was propitious. It was wonderful! There was no rain and it was not too hot; the flies did not bite us and the dust was not annoying. And my Yakov looked better every day. I must tell you that in the open air Yakov never saw *him* but he felt his presence behind him, just at his back, or his shadow would glide by him, which troubled my son very much. But this time nothing of the kind happened; and at the inns where we stayed the night he saw nothing either. We

did not talk much but how happy we were, especially I! I saw my poor boy coming back to life. I cannot describe, sir, what I felt then. Well, we reached Voronezh at last. We washed and made ourselves clean and went to the Cathedral, to the shrine of the saint. For three whole days we scarcely left the Cathedral. How many special services we had said for us, how many candles we set up! and all went smoothly and well; our days were devout, our nights were tranquil; my Yasha slept like a baby. He began talking to me of his own accord. He would ask me, "Father, do you see anything?" while he smiled. "I see nothing," I would reply. "Nor I either," he would say. What more could I desire? My gratitude to the saint knew no bounds.

Three days passed, and I said to Yakov: "Well, now, my boy, things are better; it is a happy day for us. There is only one thing left to do: make your confession, and take the sacrament; and then let us go home in God's name and after a good rest and working on the land to restore your strength, we can begin to look about us and find a post or something.

Marfa Savvishna will be sure to help us in that."

"No," said Yakov, "why should we trouble her? I will take her a ring from St. Mitrofany's shrine."

I was quite carried away.

"Mind you take a silver and not a gold one, not a betrothal ring," I said.

My Yakov flushed and only repeated we must not trouble her, but he agreed to everything at once.

We went next day to the Cathedral; my Yakov went to confession—and how earnestly he prayed before that!—and then he went to the sacrament. I stood a little apart and could hardly feel the earth under my feet. The angels in heaven are not happier than I was! Only I looked and wondered what it meant: my Yakov had taken the sacrament but he did not go to drink the wine afterwards! He stood with his back to me.

"Yakov," I said to him, "why are you standing still?"

He turned round sharply; and would you believe it, I stepped back, I was so frightened;

his face sometimes looked dreadful but now it had become savage and terrible. He was pale as death, his hair was standing on end, his eyes were squinting . . . my voice failed me from terror, I tried to speak but could not—I almost swooned. And he simply dashed out of the church. I followed him . . . he went straight to the inn where we had slept the night, put his wallet on his back and set off. "Where are you going?" I shouted. "Yakov, what is the matter with you? Stop, wait!" But not a word did Yakov say in answer, he ran like a hare and it was impossible to overtake him. He vanished. I turned back at once, hired a cart—I was all of a shake and could say nothing but Lord, Lord! And I did not understand what had happened to us. I made my way home, for I felt sure that he had gone there. And I did in fact come upon him striding along the high-road, four miles from the town. I overtook him, jumped out of the cart and ran up to him, "Yasha! Yasha!" He stopped, turned round facing me, but kept his eyes on the ground and his mouth tightly shut. And whatever I said to him he stood like a post and

one could only see he was breathing. And at last he set off along the road again. What could I do? I trudged after him.

Oh, what a journey that was, sir! Our return was as awful as our journey to Voronezh had been joyful. If I began talking to him he would turn round and snap with his teeth like a tiger or hyæna. I do not know how it was I did not go out of my mind then! At last one night, in a peasant's smoky hut he sat on the sleeping shelf, dangling his legs and looking about him; I fell on my knees before him and wept and bitterly prayed to him: "Don't kill your old father outright, don't drive him to despair—tell me what has happened to you!"

He fixed his eyes on me—though till then he had looked as though he had not seen who was before him—and all at once he began to speak, and in such a voice that it is ringing in my ears till now.

"Listen, father," he said, "do you want to know the whole truth? Here it is for you. When I took the sacrament, as you remember, and while the consecrated element was still in my mouth, *he* suddenly stood before me as

though he had sprung out of the ground (in the church, in full daylight!) and whispered in my ear (and he has never spoken to me before) 'Spit it out and stamp on it!' I did so—I spat it out and trod on it. And so now I am lost forever, for every crime is forgiven but not the sin against the Holy Ghost."

And uttering these awful words, my son fell on the shelf while I sank down on the floor of the hut. My legs gave way under me.

Father Alexey was silent for an instant and put his hand over his eyes.

But why should I worry you and myself any longer (he went on). My son and I dragged ourselves home, and soon after that his end came and I lost my Yakov. For some days before his death he neither ate nor drank—he kept walking up and down the room repeating that his sin could not be forgiven . . . but he did not see *him* any more. "He has ruined my soul," he said, "why should he come any more?" And as soon as Yakov took to his bed he sank into unconsciousness, and so, without penitence, like a senseless worm, he passed from this life into eternity.

But I don't want to believe that the Lord will pass stern judgment on him . . .

And one reason why I cannot believe it is that he looked very beautiful lying in the coffin; he seemed to have grown quite young again and looked like my Yakov of old days. His face was so pure and gentle, his hair curled in ringlets and there was a smile on his lips. Marfa Savvishna came to look at him—she said the same. She put flowers all round him and she put flowers on his heart, and she put a stone on his grave at her own expense.

And I was left alone. And that is why, sir, you have detected great sorrow in my face. It will never pass away—it never can.

I wanted to say some word of comfort to Father Alexey . . . but I could not find anything to say.

We parted soon afterwards.

Paris, 1877.

THREE MEETINGS

THREE MEETINGS

Passa que' colli e vieni allegramente,
Non ti curar di tanta compania—
Vieni, pensando a me segretamente—
Ch'io t'accompagna per tutta la via.

I

THERE was nowhere I used to go so often to shoot in the summer as to the village of Glinnoye, which was fifteen miles from my own estate. Perhaps the best place for game in our whole district was near that village. After going through all the surrounding thickets and fields, towards the end of the day I invariably turned into a marsh close by, the only one in the neighbourhood, and from there went back to my hospitable host, the elder of the village, with whom I always used to put up for the night.

From the marsh to Glinnoye it is not more than a mile and a half. The road runs by the

valley, except that halfway one has to climb a small hill. On the top of that hill lies a homestead consisting of a small, uninhabited manor-house and garden. It almost always happened to me to pass by it in the full glow of the sunset and I remember that this house with its nailed-up windows reminded me of a blind old man who has come out to warm himself in the sun. He sits, poor dear, close to the road. The light of the sun has long ago passed into unchanging darkness for him but he feels it on his raised and outstretched face and on his warmed cheeks. It seemed as though no one had lived in the house itself for years; but in the tiny lodge in the garden there was a decrepit house-serf who had received his freedom, a tall, stooping, grey-headed old man with an expressive and immobile face. He was always sitting on a little bench in front of the one little window in the lodge, looking with mournful dreaminess into the distance, and on seeing me he would rise a little from his seat and bow with the deliberate dignity that distinguishes old house-serfs belonging to the gen-

eration not of our fathers, but of our grandfathers.

I used to speak to him but he was not fond of talking: all I learned from him was that the place on which he was living belonged to the granddaughter of his old master, a widow who had a younger sister; that they both lived in towns beyond the sea and that they never showed themselves at home; that he himself would like to end his days as soon as might be because "one goes on munching bread till one is weary; one has been doing it so long." The old man's name was Lukyanitch.

One day I somehow lingered late in the fields; I had come upon a good deal of game, and it was a good day for shooting—from early morning still and grey as though full of the feeling of evening. I wandered far, and it was not merely getting dusk but the moon had risen, and night, as the saying is, had long hung over the sky, when I reached the familiar house. I had to walk along beside the fence of the garden. . . .

There was perfect stillness all around. . . .

I crossed the high-road, cautiously made my

way through the dusty nettles and leaned against the low hurdle. The little garden all fragrant and dewy lay perfectly still before me, all lighted up, and, as it were, soothed to rest by the silver rays of the moon; laid out in the old-fashioned style, it consisted of one oblong plot. Little straight paths met at a round flower-bed in the very centre, thickly overgrown with asters. It was surrounded by an even border of tall lime-trees except at one part where through an opening about fourteen feet wide between the trees I saw the low-pitched house with, to my surprise, two windows lighted up. Young apple-trees rose here and there above the lawn; the soft blue of the night sky showed through their slender branches bathed in the slumbering moonlight; before each apple-tree its faint chequered shadow lay on the silvery grass. On one side of the garden the lime-trees, flooded with pale, vivid, motionless light, were a blur of dull green; on the other side they stood all black and opaque; a strange, suppressed rustle arose from time to time in their thick foliage; they seemed to be

calling one to the paths beneath them, to be beckoning one to their dark canopy.

The whole sky was spangled with stars; their soft blue radiance flowed mysteriously from on high; they seemed gazing with gentle attention at the far-away earth. Little, delicate clouds floated now and again across the moon and for an instant changed its peaceful light to a vague but luminous mist. . . . Everything was slumbering. The air, warm and fragrant, did not stir; only from time to time it quivered as water quivers at the fall of a twig. There was a feeling of languor, of yearning in it. . . . I bent over the fence; a red field poppy lifted its straight stalk above the rank grass before me, and a great round drop of night dew glittered with a dark light in its open cup. Everything was slumbering, everything lay luxuriously and seemed to be gazing upwards, waiting without stirring. . . . What was this warm, not yet sleeping night awaiting?

It was waiting for a sound; a living voice was what that listening silence awaited—but all was still. The nightingales had long ceased singing, and the sudden hum of a beetle flying

by, the faint splash of a tiny fish in the pool at the end of the garden beyond the lime-trees, the drowsy note of a startled bird, the far-away cry in the fields,—so far away that the ear could not distinguish whether it was the cry of a man, a beast or a bird,—the short, quick thud of hoofs upon the road—all these faint sounds, these rustles, only deepened the stillness. . . . My heart yearned with an indescribable feeling that was akin to the expectation or memory of happiness; I dared not stir, I stood motionless before the motionless garden, bathed in moonlight and dew, and, I do not know why, gazed fixedly at those two windows dimly red in the soft half shadow, when suddenly a chord rang out in the house,—it rang out and rolled away like a wave. . . . The sensitively resonant air responded with an echo . . . I could not help starting.

A woman's voice rang out after the chord. . . . I began listening greedily—and . . . can I express my amazement? . . . two years before in Italy at Sorrento I had heard the same song, the same voice . . . yes, yes. . . .

"Vieni, pensando a me segretamente. . . ."

It was the same, I knew those strains. . . . It had happened like this: I was returning home after a long walk on the sea-shore. I was walking rapidly along the street; night had fallen—the magnificent night of the South, not still and mournfully pensive like ours, no! all bright, luxurious and lovely as a happy woman in the flower of her youth; the moon shone with incredible brilliance, the glittering stars seemed quivering in the dark-blue sky, the black shadows stood out sharply against the earth that looked almost yellow in the bright light. On both sides of the street stretched the stone walls of the gardens, orange-trees lifted their crooked branches above them, the golden globes of the heavy fruit could just be seen hidden among the tangled leaves, or stood out vividly, displayed in all their richness by the moon. On many of the trees there was still the tender whiteness of the flowers; the air was saturated with languorous fragrance, powerful, poignant and almost oppressive, yet indescribably sweet.

I walked along and I must confess I had grown so used to all these marvels that I thought

of nothing but getting quickly home to my hotel, when all at once from a little pavilion built right upon the wall beside which I was hurrying there came the sound of a woman's voice. It was singing a song I did not know, and in its sound there was a note of such eager summons, it seemed so full of the passionate and joyful expectation expressed in the words of the song that I could not help stopping short at once and raising my head. There were two windows in the pavilion but the blinds were down in both and only a pale light filtered through their narrow chinks. After repeating twice *"vieni, vieni"* the voice died away. I heard the faint twang of strings, as though of a guitar falling on the carpet, there was a light rustle of skirts, a faint creak of the floor.

The streaks of light vanished from one window. . . . Someone from within came up to it and leaned over it. I stepped back two paces. All at once the blinds rattled and were thrust back; a graceful woman dressed all in white rapidly thrust her charming head out of the window and, stretching out her arms to me, said: *"Sei tu?"* I was taken aback, I did not know

what to say, but at the same instant the unknown lady darted back with a faint cry, the blind was dropped and the light in the pavilion grew even dimmer, as though it had been carried off into another room. I stood motionless and it was a long time before I came to myself. The face of the woman who had so suddenly appeared before me was strikingly beautiful. I had caught too hurried a glimpse of it to be able to recall at once each separate feature, but the general impression was unutterably vivid and deep. . . . I felt at that time that I should not forget that face all my life.

The moonlight fell straight upon the wall of the pavilion, on the window at which she had shown herself and, my God! how magnificently her great dark eyes had shone in its radiance, what a heavy wave of half loose, black hair fell on the curve of her lifted, shapely shoulder! What wealth of shy, luxurious softness in the soft bending of her waist, what a caress in her voice when she called me—in that hurried but resonant whisper! After standing for some time on the same spot I walked a little aside

in the shadow of the opposite wall and fell to gazing at the pavilion with a sort of stupid bewilderment and expectation. I listened . . . listened with strained attention . . . I fancied now someone softly breathing at the darkened window, now a rustle and a soft laugh. At last there came the sound of far-away footsteps . . . they came closer; a man of about the same height as myself appeared at the end of the street and went hurriedly up to a little gate, which I had not noticed before, close to the pavilion, without looking round, knocked twice with the iron ring, waited a little, knocked again, and sang in an undertone, *"Ecco ridente. . . ."* The gate was opened . . . he noiselessly glided in. I started, shook my head, and with a gesture of perplexity morosely pulled my hat over my eyes and discontentedly set off home. Next day quite fruitlessly and in the very heat of the day I walked for two hours up and down the street by the pavilion and that evening I left Sorrento without having visited Tasso's house.

The reader may well imagine the amazement with which I was instantly overcome when I

heard the same voice, the same song in the steppe, in one of the remotest parts of Russia. . . . As then it was night; as then the voice rang out from a lighted, unknown room; as then I was alone. My heart beat violently. "Isn't it a dream?" I thought. And then I heard again the last *"Vieni. . . ."* Would the window open? Would the woman show herself? The window was opened. At the window a woman appeared. I recognised her at once though there was the distance of fifty paces between us, though a light cloud veiled the moon. It was she, my unknown lady of Sorrento. But she did not as before stretch her bare arms out of the window; she softly folded them and, leaning them on the window-sill, fell to gazing into the garden silently, without moving. Yes, it was she; those were her features which I could never forget, those were the eyes of which I had never seen the like. As before, a full white dress enfolded her limbs. She looked a little plumper than at Sorrento. Everything about her was fragrant of the confidence and repose of love, of the triumph of beauty, soothed by happiness. For a long while she did

not stir, then looked back into the room and suddenly drawing herself up exclaimed three times in a loud and ringing voice: *"Addio!"* The lovely sounds floated far, far away, and for a long time their vibrations lingered, growing fainter and dying away above the lime-trees in the garden and in the fields behind me and in all directions. For some moments all the country round me was full of that woman's voice, everything was ringing in response to it—was ringing with it. She closed the window and a few minutes later the light in the house was put out.

As soon as I recovered myself—which I confess was not very quickly—I walked at once beside the garden towards the lodge, went up to the closed gates and looked over the fence. Nothing exceptional could be seen in the yard; a carriage was standing in the corner under a shed. The fore part of it, bespattered with dry mud, looked white in the moonlight. The shutters in the house were closed as before. I forgot to say I had not visited Glinnoye for about a week. For over half an hour I walked up and down before the fence in perplexity, so

that at last I attracted the attention of the old house-dog; he did not bark, however, but only looked at me from his seat under the gate with extraordinary irony in his screwed-up, purblind eyes. I understood his hint and made off. But I had not gone half a mile before I heard the clatter of horses' hoofs behind me . . . a few moments later a man on a black horse dashed by me at a quick trot. Rapidly turning his face towards me, so that I caught a glimpse of an eagle nose and handsome moustache under a cap pulled forward on his forehead, he took the road to the right and immediately vanished behind the copse.

"So that is he," I thought and my heart was strangely stirred. It seemed to me that I recognised him; his figure certainly reminded me of the man whom I had seen go in at the gate of the garden in Sorrento. Half an hour later I was at Glinnoye, at the elder's. I woke him up and at once began asking him who had come to that house. He answered me with an effort that the ladies who owned it had arrived.

"What ladies?" I asked impatiently.

"Why, the ladies, to be sure," he answered very listlessly.

"But what sort of ladies?"

"Why, like any ladies, to be sure."

"Russian?"

"Why, what else should they be? Russian to be sure."

"Not foreigners?"

"Eh?"

"Is it long since they arrived?"

"That I couldn't say."

"Are they rich?"

"That we can't tell. Maybe they are."

"Did not some gentleman come with them?"

"A gentleman?"

"Yes, a gentleman."

The elder heaved a sigh.

"Oh, Lord!" he brought out, yawning. . . . "No-oo, no . . . gentleman . . . no gentleman, I think. I can't say," he added suddenly.

"And what sort of neighbours are there living here?"

"What sort of neighbours? Why, all sorts, to be sure."

"All sorts?—and what's their name?"

"Whose name? The ladies' or the neighbours'?"

"The ladies'."

The elder heaved a sigh again.

"What's their name?" he muttered. "Goodness knows what their name is! The elder one, I fancy, is Anna Fyodorovna and the other . . . No, I don't know what the other's name is."

"Well, what is their surname, anyway?"

"Surname?"

"Yes, surname, family name."

"Family name . . . yes . . . But I really don't know it."

"Are they young?"

"Well, no, not that."

"How so?"

"Why, the younger one will be over forty."

"That's all fibs."

The elder was silent for a space.

"Well, you know best. We can't say."

"There, you are at it again!" I exclaimed with vexation. Knowing by experience that when a Russian takes to answering in that way there is no possibility of getting anything sensible

out of him (moreover my host had only just lain down to sleep and at every answer he gave a faint lurch forward, opening his eyes wide with babyish wonder, and with difficulty parting his lips smeared with the honey of the first sweet sleep), I made a gesture of despair and, refusing supper, went to the barn.

For a long time I could not sleep. "What is she?" I was continually asking myself. "A Russian? If she is Russian why does she speak Italian? . . . The elder makes out that she is not young. . . . But he is lying. . . . And who is that happy man? . . . There is no making it out at all. But what a strange adventure! Is it possible it has happened like this twice? . . . Anyway I will find out who she is and why she has come here. . . ." Excited by these confused and disconnected thoughts, I fell asleep late and had strange dreams. . . . At one moment I fancied I was wandering somewhere in the wilderness in the very heat of mid-day—and suddenly I saw before me, racing over the baked yellow sand, a great patch of shadow. . . . I raised my head—she, my beautiful lady, was floating

through the air, all white with long white wings and beckoning me to her. I rushed after her; but she floated lightly and rapidly and I could not rise up from the earth and stretched out eager arms in vain. *"Addio!"* she said to me, flying away. "Why have you no wings? *Addio!"* and then from all sides I heard *"Addio,"* every grain of sand was shouting and shrieking to me *"Addio"* . . . That *i* rang out in an insufferable sharp trill. . . . I waved it away like a gnat. I looked for her . . . but she had already become a little cloud and was softly mounting to the sun; the sun quivered, trembled, laughed, stretched out long golden threads to meet her, and now she was tangled in those threads and melting into them, while I shouted at the top of my voice like one possessed: "It's not the sun, it's not the sun, it's that Italian spider; who gave him a passport to Russia? I will expose him: I saw him stealing oranges in other people's gardens. . . ."

Then I dreamed I was walking along a narrow mountain path . . . I was hurrying; I had to get somewhere in haste, some unheard-of happiness was awaiting me; all at once a

huge cliff rose up before me; I looked for a path; I went to the right, I went to the left—there was no way to pass! And suddenly beyond the rock a voice rang out: *"Passa, passa que' colli. . . ."* It was calling me, that voice; it repeated its mournful summons. I rushed about in my misery seeking for the smallest crevice. . . . Alas! It was an overhanging wall, granite on all sides. . . . *"Passa que' colli"* the voice repeated plaintively. My heart ached, I flung myself against the smooth stone, in my frenzy I tore it with my nails. A dark passage suddenly opened before me. . . . Faint with joy I struggled forward. . . .

"Nonsense," someone shouted to me: "You shall not pass. . . ." I looked up: Lukyanitch was standing before me, waving his arms and threatening me. I hurriedly fumbled in my pockets: I meant to bribe him; but I could find nothing in my pockets. . . . "Lukyanitch," I said to him, "Lukyanitch, let me pass; I will reward you afterwards."

"You are mistaken, Signor," Lukyanitch answered, and his face assumed a strange expression. "I am not a servant; recognise in me

Don Quixote De La Mancha, the famous knight-errant; I have been all my life seeking my Dulcinea and could not find her, and I cannot endure that you should find yours. . . ."

"Passa que' colli . . ." the voice, almost sobbing, rings out again. "Stand aside, Signor!" I cried with fury, and was on the point of dashing forward, but the knight's long lance struck me to the heart . . . I fell like one dead . . . I lay on my back. . . . I could not stir . . . and behold, I saw her coming with a lamp in her hand gracefully holding it above her head. Looking about her in the darkness and cautiously stealing up, she bent down over me. . . . "So this is he, that fool. He tried to find out who I am," she said with a contemptuous laugh, and the burning oil of her lamp dropped straight on my wounded heart. . . . "Psyche!" I cried with an effort, and woke up. . . .

I slept badly all night and was on my feet before it was light. Hurriedly dressing and taking my gun, I set off at once for the house. My impatience was so great that the sunrise was only beginning by the time I reached the

familiar gates. The larks were singing all around, jackdaws were cawing on the birch-trees; but in the house everything was sleeping the deep sleep of morning. Even the dog was snoring behind the fence. In an agony of expectation, strained almost to anger, I walked up and down the dewy grass, looking incessantly at the low-pitched and ugly little house which sheltered this enigmatic creature within its walls. All at once the little gate gave a faint creak and opened, and Lukyanitch appeared in the gateway, wearing a kind of striped Cossack coat. His face with its ruffled hair seemed to me more morose than ever. Looking at me not without some amazement, he was about to shut the gate again.

"My good man, my good man!" I cried out hurriedly.

"What do you want at such an early hour?" he replied slowly in a hollow voice.

"Tell me, please, your mistress has come, I am told?"

Lukyanitch was silent for a moment.

"Yes, she has come. . . ."

"Alone?"

"With her sister."

"Hadn't they visitors yesterday?"

"No."

And he pulled the gate towards him.

"Stay, stay, my good man . . . do me the favour . . ."

Lukyanitch coughed and shrank together from the cold.

"Why, what is it you want?"

"Tell me, please, how old is your mistress?"

Lukyanitch glanced at me suspiciously.

"How old is my mistress? I don't know. Over forty she must be."

"Over forty! And how old is her sister?"

"Why, she's about forty."

"Impossible! And is she good-looking?"

"Who?—the sister?"

"Yes, the sister."

Lukyanitch gave a laugh.

"I don't know; that is as one fancies; to my thinking, she is not."

"How so?"

'Oh, she's not much to boast of. Rather weakly looking."

"Oh, indeed! And has no one else come?"

"No one. Who should come?"

"But that cannot be. I . . ."

"Eh, sir, we shall never have done talking," the old man answered with vexation. "It's so cold! Pray excuse me."

"Stay, stay . . . here's . . ." and I held out a quarter rouble I had got ready beforehand but my hand knocked against the rapidly slammed gate. The silver coin fell on the earth, rolled away and lay at my feet.

"Ah, the old rogue," I thought; "Don Quixote De La Mancha, you have been told to hold your tongue, it seems . . . but wait a bit, you won't get rid of me so easily. . . ."

I vowed to myself that come what may I would get to the bottom of it. For about half an hour I walked up and down, not knowing what course to decide upon. At last I made up my mind first to find out in the village who had arrived at the place and whose it was, then to come back again and, as the saying is, not to give it up till the mystery was explained. My unknown lady would come out into the garden, I should see her at last by daylight, from close by, as a living woman, not as an

apparition. The village was less than a mile away and I set off at once in that direction, stepping out lightly and confidently. A strange defiance was rising and working in my blood; the invigorating freshness of morning strung me up after my restless night.

In the village I learned all that was to be learned from two peasants on their way to work; that is, that the place together with the village I had reached was called Mihailovskoye, that it belonged to the widow of a major, a lady called Anna Fyodorovna Shlykov, that she had an unmarried sister called Pelageya Fyodorovna Badayev, that they were both getting on in years and were wealthy, that they scarcely ever stayed at home but were always travelling about, that they kept no servants but two maids and a man cook, that Anna Fyodorovna had arrived a few days before from Moscow accompanied by no one but her sister. This last circumstance disconcerted me greatly; I could not suppose that the peasants, too, had orders to say nothing about my unknown lady. But to admit that Anna Fyodorovna Shlykov, a widow of five and forty, and the charming

young woman I had seen the night before were the same person was impossible. Pelageya Fyodorovna was, according to the description of her, not distinguished by beauty either, and, besides, at the very thought that the woman I had seen in Sorrento could be called Pelageya and, worse still, Badayev, I shrugged my shoulders and laughed angrily. And yet I had seen her yesterday in that house . . . seen her, seen her with my own eyes, I thought. Thoroughly vexed, roused to fury, but still more persistent in my intention, I was on the point of going back to the garden . . . but I glanced at my watch: it was not yet six o'clock. I made up my mind to wait a little. At the house everyone was most likely still asleep. . . . And to hang about it at such an hour would only have been exciting suspicion for nothing; moreover, there was a stretch of bushes before me and beyond them I could see a copse of aspen-trees. . . . I must do myself the justice to say that in spite of the thoughts that were exciting me the noble passion for the chase was not utterly eclipsed. "Maybe," I thought, "I shall come upon a covey,—and the

time will pass." I went into the thicket. But to tell the truth, I walked very carelessly and paid little attention to the rules of the art: I did not keep a constant watch on my dog, I did not "snort" over a thick bush in the hope that a red-crested blackcock would fly up from it with a clatter and outcry, and I kept looking at my watch, which was utterly out of place. At last it was getting on for nine. "It's time," I cried aloud, and was just turning back towards the house when a huge blackcock really was startled out of the thick grass two paces from me; I fired at the magnificent bird and wounded it under the wing. It almost rolled over but righted itself, made for the copse, quivering its wings and diving, tried to rise above the first aspen-trees but, growing weak, fell all of a heap into a thicket. To abandon such game would have been utterly unpardonable; I promptly went after it, entered the copse, made a signal to Dianka, and a few moments later heard a feeble rustling and clattering; it was the unhappy blackcock struggling under the paws of my quick-scented dog. I picked it up, put it in my gamebag, looked

round—and stood still as though rivetted to the spot. . . .

The copse into which I had gone was very thick and overgrown so that I had difficulty in getting to the spot where the bird had fallen; but at a short distance from me there was a winding cart-road and along that road my beautiful lady was riding on horseback at a walking pace and beside her the man who had overtaken me the evening before; I recognised him by his moustaches. They were riding slowly in silence, holding each other's hands; their horses seemed scarcely moving, languidly swaying from side to side and gracefully craning their long necks. Recovering from my first terror . . . yes, terror—I can give no other name to the feeling which suddenly overwhelmed me—I simply fastened my eyes on her. How lovely she was! How enchantingly her graceful form moved to meet me in the midst of the emerald greenery! Soft shadows, delicate reflections slowly glided over her—over her long grey dress, over her slender, slightly bowed neck, over her pale rosy face, over her glossy black hair which sprang

out in luxuriant abundance from under her low hat. But how can I describe the expression of the perfect, passionate—mutely passionate bliss with which her features were breathing! Her head seemed as though bent under the weight of it; moist gleams of gold shone out of her dark eyes, half hidden by their lashes; they looked nowhere, those happy eyes, and the delicate brows were lowered over them. A vague, childlike smile—the smile of deep joy—was straying on her lips; it seemed as though excess of happiness was exhausting and as it were breaking her down a little, just as the fully opened flower sometimes breaks down its stalk; both her hands lay limp: one in the hand of the man riding beside her, the other on the horse's forelock. I had time to look at her thoroughly—and at him also. . . . He was a handsome, imposing-looking man with a foreign face. He was looking at her boldly and gaily and, as far as I could judge, admiring her with secret pride. He was admiring her, the villain, and was very well pleased with himself and not sufficiently moved, not melted with gratitude—yes, that was what was lacking.

. . . And, indeed, no man deserves such devotion. What soul, even the noblest, is worthy of inspiring such happiness in another soul? . . . I must confess I envied him. . . . Meanwhile they both were on a level with me. . . . My dog suddenly jumped out on the road and barked. My unknown lady started, looked hurriedly round, and, seeing me, switched her horse on the neck with the riding whip. The horse gave a snort, reared and set off at a gallop. . . . The man at once spurred his raven horse and when a few minutes later I came out of the copse along the road they were both galloping in the golden distance across the open country, swaying gracefully and rhythmically in their saddles and were galloping not in the direction of the house. . . .

I watched them. . . . They soon vanished over a hill, brightly lighted by the sun on the dark line of the horizon. I stood and waited, with slow footsteps went back into the wood and sat down on a little path, covering my eyes with my hands.

I have noticed when one meets strangers one need only close one's eyes and their features

at once rise up before one; anyone can verify the truth of my observations in the street. The more familiar the face the more difficult it is to see it and the less clear is its expression; one remembers it but cannot see it . . . and one's own face one can never picture . . . each separate trait, however slight, is familiar, but you cannot put the whole image together. And so I sat with closed eyes—and at once saw my unknown lady and her companion and their horses and everything. . . . The smiling face of the man stood out before me with peculiar sharpness and distinctness. I fell to looking intently at it . . . it grew blurred and melted away into a crimson mist and her image, too, floated away after it and sank and would not come back again.

I got up. "Well," I thought, "I have seen them, anyway, have seen them both clearly. . . . I have only to find out their names." To try and find out their names! What petty, inappropriate curiosity, but, I swear, it was not curiosity that was roused in me: it really seemed to me impossible not to find out at least who they were after chance had so strangely

and so persistently thrown me in their way. I had, however, no longer the same impatient perplexity as before; it was replaced by a confused melancholy feeling of which I was a little ashamed. . . . I was filled with envy. . . .

I did not hurry back to the house. I must own I began to be ashamed of probing another person's secret. Moreover the appearance of the loving couple by day in the sunlight, though unexpected and, I repeat, strange, had not exactly calmed, but, as it were, cooled me off. I saw in all this adventure now nothing supernatural, marvellous . . . nothing like an incredible dream. . . .

I began shooting again with more attention than before; but yet I had no real enthusiasm for it. I came across a covey and it kept me for an hour and a half. . . . The young snipe for a long time did not call in response to my whistle—probably because I did not whistle sufficiently "objectively."

The sun had risen very high (my watch said twelve o'clock) as I turned my steps to the garden of the old house. I walked without haste. When at last I caught a glimpse from the hill

of the little low house . . . my heart began quivering again. I drew near . . . and not without secret satisfaction caught sight of Lukyanitch. He was sitting as before motionless on the bench before the lodge. The gates were shut and the shutters also.

"Good-day, old man," I shouted from some distance; "have you come out to warm yourself?"

Lukyanitch turned his face towards me and lifted his cap without speaking. I went up to him.

"Good-day, old man, good-day," I repeated, wanting to soften him. "How's this," I added, chancing to see my new quarter rouble on the ground, "didn't you see it?"

And I pointed to the little silver disc half sticking out in the short grass.

"Yes, I saw it."

"Then how is it you didn't pick it up?"

"Oh, it's not my money, so I didn't pick it up."

"What a man you are!" I protested not without embarrassment, and picking up the quarter

rouble I held it out to him again. "Take it, take it for tea."

"Much obliged," Lukyanitch answered me with a calm smile. "There's no need; we do well as it is; much obliged."

"But I am ready to give you more with pleasure," I replied in confusion.

"What for? Don't trouble yourself, your honour—much obliged for your kindness, but we shall have bread and the best of it. Maybe more than we can eat at this time of day."

And he got up and held out his hand towards the little gate.

"Stay, stay, old man," I said, almost in despair. "How unwilling you are to talk to-day, really. . . . Tell me, at any rate, your mistress —has she got up yet?"

"Yes."

"And . . . is she at home?"

"No, her honour is not at home."

"Has she driven out to pay visits or what?"

"No, sir, she has gone away to Moscow."

"To Moscow! but she was here this morning?"

"Yes."

"And she slept the night here?"

"Yes."

"And she had only come a little while ago?"

"Yes."

"Then how is it, my man?"

"Why, it will be an hour ago her honour was pleased to set off for Moscow again."

"To Moscow!"

I stared at Lukyanitch in stupefaction; this, I own, I had not expected. . . .

And Lukyanitch looked at me. The cunning smile of old age twisted his dry lips and faintly gleamed in his mournful eyes.

"And she has gone with her sister?" I brought out at last.

"Yes."

"So that there is no one in the house now?"

"No. . . ."

"The old man is deceiving me," flashed through my mind; "that cunning smile is not for nothing."

"Listen, Lukyanitch," I said aloud, "will you do me a favour?"

"What is your pleasure?" he brought out

slowly, evidently beginning to be worried by my questions.

"You say there is no one in the house; can you show it to me?"

"That is, you want to look at the rooms?"

"Yes, at the rooms."

Lukyanitch was silent for a space.

"Certainly," he brought out at last. "Please come. . . ."

And bending down, he stepped over the threshold of the little gate. I followed him. Crossing the little yard, we mounted the shaky steps. The old man pushed open the door; there was no lock on it. A cord with a loop hung through the key-hole. . . . We went into the house. It consisted of five or six low-pitched rooms and, as far as I could distinguish in the faint light which percolated scantily through the chinks of the shutters, the furniture in the rooms was very plain and decrepit. In one of them (the one which looked out into the garden) there stood a little old piano. . . . I raised the bent cover and struck the keys: a sour hissing note rang out and peevishly died away as through complaining of my impudence;

there was no sign from which one could have guessed that people had just lately left the house; there was a smell in it of something deathly and stifling—not as though it were lived in; only a scrap of paper lying about here and there showed by its whiteness that it had not been here long. I picked up one such scrap of paper; it turned out to be a bit of a letter; on one side in a bold feminine hand were traced the words *"se taire?"*; on the other side I made out the word *"bonheur."* . . . On a little round table by the window there stood a nosegay of half-withered flowers and a crumpled green ribbon lay beside it. . . . I took that little ribbon for a souvenir. Lukyanitch opened a narrow door which was papered like the wall.

"Here," he said, stretching out his hand, "this is a bedroom and there beyond it is the maid's room, and there are no other apartments."

We walked back along the passage. "And what room is that?" I asked, pointing to a broad white door with a lock.

"That," Lukyanitch answered in a hollow voice, "that's nothing."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, nothing . . . a storeroom . . ." and he was going on towards the hall.

"A storeroom? Can't I look at it?"

"What can you want to see that for, really?" Lukyanitch protested with displeasure. "What's there for you to see? Boxes, old crockery. It's a storeroom and nothing else. . . ."

"All the same, do show it me, old man, please," I said, though inwardly ashamed of my unseemly pertinacity. "You see . . . I should like . . . I want just such a house for myself in the country. . . ."

I felt ashamed; I could not finish the little speech I had begun.

Lukyanitch stood with his grey head drooping on his breast, and kept looking at me somewhat strangely from under his brows.

"Show it me," I said.

"Oh, very well," he answered at last, took out the key and reluctantly unlocked the door.

I glanced into the storeroom. There certainly was nothing remarkable in it. On the walls there were old portraits with gloomy, al-

most black faces and angry eyes. The floor was littered with all sorts of rubbish.

"Well, have you looked at it?" Lukyanitch asked me grimly.

"Yes, thank you," I answered hurriedly.

He slammed the door. I went into the hall and from the hall into the courtyard.

Lukyanitch saw me out, muttered: "I wish you good-day," and was going off to his lodge.

"And what lady was it staying here, yesterday?" I called after him. "I met her to-day in the copse."

I hoped to take him unawares by my sudden question and to evoke an unconsidered answer. But the old man only gave a toneless laugh and, going into his lodge, slammed the door.

I went back to Glinnoye. I felt uncomfortable, like a boy who has been put to shame.

"No," I said to myself. "It seems I am not to get to the bottom of this mystery. Bother it, I won't think any more about it."

An hour later I was driving home, thoroughly irritated and out of humour.

A week passed. In spite of my efforts to drive away the thought of my unknown lady,

of her companion, of my meeting with them, it was continually returning and haunting me with the tiresome persistence of an after-dinner fly. . . . Lukyanitch with his mysterious glances and reserved speeches, with his cold, melancholy smile was incessantly recurring to my mind also. The house itself, when I recalled it, the very house itself, seemed looking slyly and stupidly at me through its half-closed shutters and, as it were, taunted me and seemed to be saying to me: "And after all you know nothing!" At last I could not restrain myself and one fine day drove over to Glinnoye and from Glinnoye set off on foot. . . . Whither? The reader can easily guess.

I must confess that as I approached the mysterious garden I was aware of rather strong excitement. There was no change in the outer appearance of the house; the same closed windows, the same forlorn and dejected air; only instead of Lukyanitch a young servant-lad of twenty in a full, long nankeen coat and a red shirt was sitting on the bench before the lodge.

"Good-day, my lad," I said in a loud voice.

He jumped up at once and opened wide his startled eyes.

"Good-day, my lad," I repeated; "where is the old man?"

"What old man?" the youth brought out slowly.

"Lukyanitch."

"Ah, Lukyanitch!" He looked away. "Do you want Lukyanitch?"

"Yes, Lukyanitch. Is he at home?"

"N-no," the lad pronounced, hesitating, "he is . . . How shall I tell you? . . ."

"Is he unwell or what?"

"No."

"Then what is it?"

"Why, he isn't here at all."

"Not here?"

"No. Something bad . . . has happened to him. . . ."

"Is he dead?" I asked with amazement.

"He strangled himself."

"Strangled himself!" I cried with horror and flung up my hands.

We looked into each other's faces without speaking.

"Was it long ago?" I asked at last.

"Just five days ago. He was buried yesterday."

"But why did he strangle himself?"

"The Lord knows. He was a free man, he had a salary; he wanted for nothing, his mistresses looked after him as though he were one of their kin. They are good to us, you know, God bless them. There is simply no making out what came over him. The Evil One must have confounded him."

"But how did he do it?"

"Why, he just took and strangled himself."

"Was there nothing noticed about him before?"

"What can I say? . . . Nothing so to say special. . . . He was always a dreary, suspicious man! He would be sighing and groaning. 'I feel dreary,' he would say. And then there was his age, you see. Of late he certainly had begun to brood a bit. He would come sometimes to see us in the village; and I am his nephew, you know. 'Well, my boy,' he would say, 'come and stay the night with me, will you?' 'Why, uncle?' 'Oh, I feel a bit fright-

ened somehow and dreary by myself. . . .' Well, and I would come to him. He would come out into the yard, and look and look like this at the house, would shake his head and heave a sigh. . . . Before the very night in which he put an end to his life, he came to us and asked me to go. Well, I came. So when we reached the lodge, he sat a little on the bench; then he got up and went out. I went into the yard and cried, 'Uncle, hey, uncle!' Uncle did not call back. I thought, 'Where can he have gone, not into the house surely?' And I went into the house. It was beginning to get dark. Well, as I passed by the store-room I heard something scraping behind the door; I took and opened the door, and there he was sitting squatting under the window. 'What are you doing here, uncle?' said I. How he turned round and shouted at me! and his eyes looked about so quickly, they were burning like a cat's. 'What do you want? Don't you see I am shaving?' And his voice was so husky. My hair stood on end to hear him and I felt frightened, I don't know why. . . . The devils must have been round him by that time.

'In the dark?' I said, and my knees were shaking. 'Oh,' said he, "that is all right. Run along.' I went away and he came out of the storeroom and locked it up. So we went back to the lodge and my fright passed off at once. 'What were you doing in the storeroom, uncle?' I said. He fairly started. 'Hold your tongue,' and he got on his bed. 'Well,' thought I, 'I had better not talk to him: it seems he is not quite the thing to-day,' so I went and lay down on the bed, too. And the night lamp was burning in the corner. So I lay down and dropped asleep, you know. . . . All at once I heard the door creak softly and open just a little. And uncle was lying with his back to the door, and, as you remember, maybe, he was always hard of hearing. But he jumped up at once . . . 'Who is calling me, eh? who? He has come for me, for me!' And he went out into the yard without his cap. . . . I wondered what was the matter with him and then like a sinner I fell asleep. When I woke up next morning Lukyanitch was not there. I went out of the room and began calling him —he was nowhere. I asked the watchman:

'Didn't you see uncle go out?' 'No,' he said, 'I didn't.' 'Well, brother,' said I, 'he's gone somehow. . . .' Oy! we were both scared! 'Let us go, Fedoseyitch,' I said, 'let us go and see whether he is in the house.' 'Very well, Vassily Timofeyitch,' he said, and he looked as white as clay. We went into the house. . . . When we passed the storeroom I looked and the padlock was hanging open on the staple. I pushed at the door and it was bolted inside. . . . Fedoseyitch ran round to look in at the window. . . . 'Vassily Timofeyitch!' he cried, 'there are legs hanging, legs!' . . . I ran to the window. And the legs were his, Lukyanitch's legs. He had hanged himself in the middle of the room. . . . Well, we sent for the police. . . . They took him down; the cord was tied with twelve knots."

"Well, what did the Court decide?"

"What did they decide? Why, nothing. They thought and thought what could be the reason of it. There was no reason for it. So they concluded that it must be supposed that he was out of his mind. He had headaches of

late; often he would keep complaining of his head."

I talked to the lad for another half-hour and went away completely bewildered. I must confess that I could not look at that decrepit house without a secret superstitious terror. . . . A month later I went away from the country and by degrees all these horrors and mysterious meetings passed out of my mind.

II

Three years had passed. I spent the greater part of that time in Petersburg and abroad and if I went home to the country it was only for a few days, so that I did not once happen to be in Glinnoye or Mihailovskoye. Nor did I see my beautiful lady nor her companion. One day towards the end of the third year I chanced to meet, at an evening party given by a lady of my acquaintance in Moscow, Madame Shlykov and her sister Pelageya Badayev, the very Pelageya whom I had, like a sinner, supposed till then to be a fictitious person.

The two ladies were no longer young, but

were of rather agreeable appearance. Their conversation was distinguished by intelligence and liveliness, they had travelled a great deal and had profited by their travels; a spontaneous gaiety was conspicuous in their behaviour. But there was absolutely nothing in common between them and my mysterious lady. I was introduced to them. I got into conversation with Madame Shlykov (her sister's attention was taken up by a distinguished scientific visitor, a geologist). I told her that I had the pleasure of being her neighbour in the X. district.

"Yes, I have a little estate there," she said, "near Glinnoye."

"To be sure, to be sure," I answered. "I know your Mihailovskoye. Do you stay there?"

"Rarely."

"You were there three years ago."

"Wait a minute, I believe I was; yes, I was."

"Alone, or with your sister?"

She glanced at me.

"With my sister. We went down there for a week, you know, on business. But we saw no one."

"H'm. You have very few neighbours there, I believe?"

"Yes, very few. And I am not very eager to see them."

"Tell me," I began, "I believe something dreadful happened that year. Lukyanitch . . ."

Madame Shlykov's eyes filled with tears at once.

"Did you know him?" she asked eagerly. "What a dreadful thing. He was such a splendid, good old man. . . . And only fancy, for no sort of reason."

"Yes, yes," I muttered, "a dreadful thing. . . ."

Her sister came up to us. She was probably bored by the learned disquisitions of the geologist on the formation of the banks of the Volga.

"Only fancy, Pauline," Madame Shlykov began, "Monsieur knew Lukyanitch."

"Really? Poor old man."

"I went shooting near Mihailovskoye more than once at the time you were there three years ago," I observed.

"I?" said Pelageya in some perplexity.

"Why, yes, of course," her sister put in hur-

riedly. "Don't you remember?" and she looked intently into her eyes.

"Oh, yes, yes . . . to be sure!" Pelageya answered all at once.

"Heigh-ho!" I thought, "I doubt whether you were there, my dear!"

"Won't you sing us something, Pelageya Fyodorovna?" a tall young man, with a shock of flaxen hair and lustreless sugary eyes, said suddenly.

"I really don't know," said Mademoiselle Badayev.

"You sing?" I exclaimed eagerly and got up from my seat. "For Heaven's sake, oh, for Heaven's sake, sing us something!"

"Why, what shall I sing you?"

"Don't you know," I asked, doing my utmost to appear unconcerned and free and easy, "an Italian song; it begins . . . *Passa que' colli?*"

"Yes, I know it," answered Pelageya quite innocently. "Why, shall I sing it to you? Certainly."

And she sat down to the piano. I, like Hamlet, fastened my eyes on Madame Shlykov. I

fancied that at the first note she gave a faint start; she sat through it quietly, however. Mademoiselle Badayev sang well. The song ended and the usual applause followed. People began begging her to sing something more, but the sisters exchanged glances and a few minutes later they took leave. As they were going out of the room I overheard the word: *"Importun."*

"Well deserved," I thought, and I did not meet them again.

Another year passed. I went to live in Petersburg. Winter came on and masked balls began. Coming out from a friend's house at eleven o'clock one evening, I felt so depressed that I made up my mind to go to the masked ball at the Hall of Nobility. For a long while I wandered beside the columns and by the mirrors, with a modestly Byronic expression on my face, that expression which as far as I can observe is seen even in the most well-bred people on such occasions—why, the Lord only knows; for a long while I hung about, at rare intervals shaking off with a jest shrill dominos with dubious lace and dirty gloves, and at still

rarer intervals entering into conversation with them myself; for a long time I resigned my ears to the blare of the trumpets and the screech of the fiddles. At last after being bored to my heart's content and having acquired a headache, I decided to go home . . . and . . . and I stayed on. . . . I saw a woman in a black domino leaning against a column. I saw her, stopped, went up to her—and . . . will the readers believe me? . . . at once recognised her as my unknown lady. How I recognised her —whether from the look she cast carelessly upon me through the long slits in the mask, or from the divine curve of her arm and shoulders, or from the peculiar feminine grandeur of her whole figure, or from some mysterious prompting that suddenly spoke within me,— I cannot say . . . but I did. With a tremor at my heart I walked by her two or three times. She did not stir; in her attitude there was something so hopelessly sorrowful that, looking at her, I involuntarily recalled two lines from a Spanish ballad:

Soy un cuadro de tristeza,
Arrimado a la pared.

I walked behind the column against which she was leaning and bending down close to her ear, softly pronounced: *"Passa que' colli."* . . .

She started all over and turned quickly to me. Our eyes met so close that I was able to detect how her pupils dilated with fear. She stared at me in bewilderment, weakly stretching out one hand.

"May 6th, 184—, at ten o'clock in the evening, in Sorrento, in the Via della Croce," I said in a deliberate voice, not taking my eyes off her,—"then in Russia in X. province, at the hamlet of Mihailovskoye on July 12th, 184—."

I said all this in French. She drew a little back, scanned me from head to foot with astonished eyes, and whispering *"Venez,"* walked hurriedly out of the ballroom; I followed her.

We walked in silence. I cannot attempt to describe my feelings as I walked beside her. A lovely vision which should suddenly become a living reality . . . the statue of Galatea stepping down from the pedestal, a living woman, before the eyes of Pygmalion, faint with expectation. . . . I could not believe my senses,

I could hardly breathe. We walked through several rooms. At last in one of them she stopped before a small sofa in the window and sat down. I sat down beside her.

She slowly turned her head towards me and looked at me intently.

"Do you . . . do you come from *him?*" she said. Her voice was weak and uncertain.

Her question confused me a little.

"No . . . not from him," I said, faltering.

"Do you know him?"

"Yes," I answered with mysterious importance. I wanted to keep up my part. "I know him."

She gazed at me distrustfully, would have said something and looked down.

"You were expecting him in Sorrento," I went on. "You saw him at Mihailovskoye, you went for a ride with him. . . ."

"How could you . . ." she began.

"I know, I know everything!"

"Your face seems somehow familiar to me," she went on, "but no. . . ."

"No, I am unknown to you."

"Then what do you want?"

"Well, I know," I repeated.

I understood very well that I ought to take advantage of this excellent opening, to go further, that my repetitions: "I know everything, I know," were becoming ridiculous, but my emotion was so great, this unexpected meeting so troubled me, I was so overwhelmed that I was absolutely unable to say anything else. And all the while I really knew nothing. I felt that I was being stupid, that from a mysterious, omniscient being such as I must have seemed to her at first, I was rapidly turning into a sort of grinning idiot . . . but there was no help for it.

"Yes, I know everything," I muttered once more.

She looked at me, hurriedly got up and was about to retreat.

But that would have been too much. I clutched at her hand. "For God's sake," I began, "sit down, listen to me. . . ."

She thought a moment and sat down.

"I told you just now," I went on with fervour, "that I know everything—that is nonsense —I know nothing, absolutely nothing; I don't

know who you are or who 'he' is and that I could astound you by what I said just now by the column you must put down to chance alone, a strange, incomprehensible chance which, as though in mockery of me, threw me beside you twice and almost in exactly the same way and made me the involuntary witness of what you desired perhaps to keep secret. . . ."

And on the spot, without suppressing or altering anything, I told her the whole story: my meeting with her in Sorrento, in Russia, my vain enquiries at Mihailovskoye, even my conversation in Moscow with Madame Shlykov and her sister.

"Now you know all about it," I said as I finished my story. "I am not going to describe to you what a deep, what a shattering, impression you made upon me; to see you and not be enchanted by you is impossible. On the other hand there is no object in my telling you what sort of impression it was either. Think under what circumstances I saw you on both occasions. Believe me, I have no inclination to abandon myself to mad hopes, but you will understand also the unutterable emotion which

overwhelmed me to-day and will pardon me, will pardon the awkward duplicity to which I brought myself to resort, to attract your attention if only for a moment. . . ."

She listened to my confused explanations without raising her head.

"What do you want from me?" she said at last.

"Want? I want nothing . . . I am happy as it is . . . I have too much respect for the secrets of others."

"Really? Yet you seem so far. . . . However," she went on, "I don't want to reproach you. Anyone would have done the same in your place. Besides, chance really has so persistently thrown us together. That, as it were, gives you a certain claim on my candour. Listen, I am not one of those misunderstood and unhappy women who go to masked balls to chatter to the first person they meet of their sufferings, who want to find hearts filled with sympathy . . . I need no one's sympathy, my own heart is dead and I have come here simply to bury it for ever."

She put her handkerchief to her lips.

"I hope," she went on with some effort, "that you do not take my words for the ordinary masquerade outpourings. You must understand that I am in no mood for that. . . ." And certainly there was something terrible in her voice for all the insinuating softness of its tone.

"I am Russian," she said in Russian—till then she had spoken French—"though I have lived little in Russia. . . . There is no need for you to know my name. Anna Fyodorovna is an old friend of mine; I did in fact go down to Mihailovskoye in her sister's name. At that time it was impossible for me to see him openly . . . and people were beginning to talk as it was. . . . At that time there were obstacles, he was not free. . . . But the man whose name should have been mine, the man with whom you saw me, has abandoned me."

She made a movement with her hand and paused.

"You really do not know him, you have not met him?"

"Not once."

"He has been almost all this time abroad.

But he is here now. . . . That is all my story," she added; "you see there is nothing mysterious, nothing special in it."

"And Sorrento?" I broke in timidly.

"I got to know him in Sorrento," she answered slowly, and she sank into musing.

We were both silent. I was strangely troubled. I was sitting beside her, beside the woman whose image had so often haunted my dreams and had so poignantly thrilled and disturbed me; I was sitting beside her and felt a chill and a weight on my heart. I knew that nothing would come of this meeting, that between her and me there was an abyss, that when we separated we should part for ever. With her head craned forward and both hands dropped on her knees she sat carelessly and apathetically. I know that carelessness of grief that cannot be healed, I know the apathy of hopeless misery!

Masked figures walked by us in couples, the strains of the "mad and monotonous" valse sounded at one minute dimly in the distance, at the next floated to us in shrill gusts of sound; the gay dance music moved me to dejection

and melancholy. "Can this be the woman," I thought, "who appeared to me at the window of that far-away little country house in all the glory of triumphant beauty?" . . . And yet it seemed as though time had not touched her. The lower part of her face not covered by her lace mask had almost the softness of childhood; but there was a chilliness about it as about a statue. . . . Galatea had stepped back onto her pedestal and there would be no coming down from it again.

All at once she drew herself up, looked towards the other room and rose from her seat.

"Give me your arm," she said, "make haste, let us go, make haste."

We went back into the ballroom. She walked so quickly that I could hardly keep up with her. She stopped at a column.

"Let us wait here," she whispered.

"You are looking for someone," I began.

But she paid no attention to me; her eyes were fixed intently on the crowd. Her big black eyes looked yearningly and menacingly from under the black velvet.

I turned in the direction of her eyes and

understood. Along the corridor formed by the rows of columns and the wall he, the man I had met with her in the copse, was coming. I knew him at once; he had scarcely changed. His fair moustache curled as handsomely, his brown eyes gleamed with the same calm and self-confident gaiety. He was walking without haste, and, his slender figure slightly bent, was telling something to a woman in a domino who was on his arm. As he reached us he suddenly raised his head, glanced first at me and then at the woman with whom I was standing and apparently recognised her, recognised her eyes, for his eyebrows twitched faintly. He screwed up his eyes and his lips curved in a scarcely perceptible but insufferably insolent sneer. He bent down to his companion, whispered a couple of words in her ear; she at once looked round, her little blue eyes hastily scanned us both and, softly laughing, she shook her little hand at him reprovingly. She faintly shrugged one shoulder and coquettishly nestled up to him. . . .

I turned round to my unknown lady. She was looking after the retreating couple and sud-

denly withdrawing her hand from my arm rushed towards the door. I was hastening after her, but turning round she glanced at me in such a way that I made her a deep bow and stayed where I was. I felt that to pursue her would be coarse and stupid.

"Please tell me, old man," I said a quarter of an hour afterwards to an acquaintance of mine, who was a living directory for Petersburg, "who is that tall, handsome man with moustaches?"

"That one? . . . He's a foreigner, rather an enigmatic creature who very rarely appears on our horizon. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing. . . ."

I went home. Since then I have never met my unknown lady. Knowing the name of the man she loved, I could no doubt have found out who she was, but I did not want to. I have said already that this woman had appeared to me like a vision and like a vision she passed by and vanished for ever.

1851.

A QUIET BACKWATER

A QUIET BACKWATER

CHAPTER I

In a rather large, recently whitewashed room in the manor-lodge of the village of Sasovo in the district of X., in the province of T., a young man in an overcoat was sitting on a narrow wooden chair at a little old warped table, looking through his accounts. Two candles in silver travelling candlesticks were burning before him; on a bench in one corner stood an open provision basket, in another a servant was putting up an iron bedstead. A samovar was grumbling and hissing behind the partition wall; a dog was turning round and round on some hay that had just been brought in. A peasant with a big beard and an intelligent face, in a new full coat tied round the waist with a red scarf, apparently the village elder, was standing in the doorway, intently watching the young man at the table. A very old, diminu-

tive piano stood against one wall beside a chest of drawers as ancient, with holes instead of locks; a dark looking-glass was visible between the windows; on the partition wall hung an old portrait with the paint peeling off the canvas, representing a lady in a farthingale, with powdered hair and a black ribbon round her slender neck. To judge from the perceptible crookedness of the ceiling and the slope of the floor which was full of crevices, the little lodge to which we have introduced the reader had existed for long ages; no one was permanently living in it; it served for the landowner on his visits. The young man sitting at the table was the owner of the village of Sasovo. He had arrived only the evening before from a larger estate about eighty miles away and was intending to go away the next day, after inspecting the establishment, hearing requests from the peasants and verifying all the business records.

"That's enough," he said, raising his head, "I am tired. You can go now," he added, addressing the village elder. "Come early to-morrow, and tell the peasants in the morning to come here in a body; do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"And tell the rural clerk to bring me his report for the last month. You did well to whitewash the walls, though," the gentleman added, looking round. "It makes it look cleaner, anyway."

The village elder, too, looked round the walls without speaking.

"Well, now go."

The village elder bowed and went out.

The gentleman stretched.

"Hey!" he cried, "bring in tea—it's bedtime!"

The servant went into the other room and soon returned with a glass of tea, a string of shop-made bread rings and a little jug of cream on a tray. The young man began upon his tea but had not sipped his glass twice when there was the sound of visitors coming into the adjoining room and a squeaky voice asked:

"Is Vladimir Sergeitch Astahov at home? Can we see him?"

Vladimir Sergeitch (this was the name of the young man in the overcoat) looked at his servant in perplexity and said in a hurried whisper: "Go and find out who it is."

The servant went out, carefully closing behind him the door which did not shut properly.

"Tell Vladimir Sergeitch," the same squeaky voice went on, "that his neighbour, Ipatov, wants to see him, if it is not disturbing him; and that another neighbour, Ivan Ilyitch Bodryakov, has come with me; he too wishes to pay his respects."

Vladimir Sergeitch made an involuntary gesture of annoyance. When the servant came into the room, however, he said to him:

"Ask them in."

And he stood up in expectation of his visitors.

The door opened and the visitors came in. One of them, a thick-set, grey-headed old gentleman with a little round head and light-coloured eyes led the way; the other, a tall, lean man of thirty-five with a long, swarthy face and hair in disorder, followed, swaying from one foot to the other. The old gentleman was wearing a neat grey frock-coat with big pearl buttons; a pink cravat, half hidden by the turned-down collar of his white shirt, was loosely swathed round his neck; his legs were adorned with gaiters, his plaid trousers were of

an agreeable check and altogether he made an agreeable impression. His companion, on the other hand, produced a less favourable effect on the spectator; he wore an old black swallow-tail coat closely buttoned up; the colour of his thick winter trousers was in keeping with his coat; there was no sign of linen at his neck or his wrists. The old man first went up to Vladimir Sergeitch and, bowing politely, said in the same high voice:

"I have the honour to introduce myself: your nearest neighbour and your kinsman, indeed, Mihail Nikolaitch Ipatov. I have long desired the pleasure of your acquaintance. I hope I am not disturbing you."

Vladimir Sergeitch answered that he was delighted and that he, too, desired . . . and that their visit was not disturbing him in the least . . . and would they not sit down and have tea?

"And this gentleman," continued the old man, listening with a cordial smile to Vladimir Sergeitch's unfinished sentences and indicating the gentleman in the swallowtail, "is also a neighbour of yours and a good friend of mine,

Ivan Ilyitch. He is extremely desirous to make your acquaintance."

The gentleman in the swallowtail—from whose countenance no one would have supposed that he was capable of being extremely desirous of anything—so absent-minded and at the same time drowsy was its expression—the gentleman in the swallowtail bowed listlessly and awkwardly. Vladimir Sergeitch bowed in response to him and again begged his visitors to sit down.

They did so.

"I am delighted," the old man began with an agreeable flourish of his hands while his companion fell to gazing at the ceiling with his mouth a little open, "delighted to have the honour at last of seeing you in person. Although you reside permanently in a district somewhat remote from these parts,—yet we reckon you so to say as properly belonging to our neighbourhood."

"That's very flattering to me," replied Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Whether flattering or not, it's the truth. You must excuse me, Vladimir Sergeitch, we

are straightforward people here in the X. district, plain in our ways; we say what we think without beating about the bush. Even on name-days we don't put on dress-coats to visit each other. Really! That is the established custom with us. In the neighbouring districts they call us 'the frock-coats' on account of that and reproach us with it as lack of breeding, but we don't pay any attention to that! Upon my word, to live in the country and stand on ceremony like that!"

"To be sure, what can be better—in the country—than simplicity of manners?" observed Vladimir Sergeitch.

"And yet," the old gentleman continued, "in our district, too, there are most intellectual people, people of European education though they don't wear dress-coats. For instance, there is our historian, Stefan Stepanitch Yevsyukov: he is studying Russian history from the most ancient times and his name is known in Petersburg, a very learned man. In our town there is an ancient Swedish cannon-ball, you know . . . it has been put up there in the middle of the square . . . it was he discovered it, you

know. Yes, indeed! Anton Karlitch Zenteler, now . . . he has studied natural history; though indeed they say all Germans succeed in that subject. When an escaped hyæna was killed here ten years ago, it was Anton Karlitch who discovered that it really was a hyæna owing to the peculiar construction of its tail. Then there's Kaburdin, too, one of our landowners; he mostly writes light articles; he has a very lively pen; his articles come out in the *Galatea*. Bodryakov . . . not Ivan Ilyitch, no, Ivan Ilyitch does not care for that sort of thing, but the other Bodryakov, Sergey . . . what is his father's name, Ivan Ilyitch, what is it?"

"Sergeitch," Ivan Ilyitch prompted him.

"Yes, Sergey Sergeitch—his hobby is poetry. Well, of course he is not a Pushkin, but sometimes he is as smart as any Petersburg fellow. Do you know his epigram on Agey Fomitch?"

"What Agey Fomitch?"

"Ah, I beg your pardon; I am always forgetting that you are not a resident here, after all. He is our Chief of Police. A very funny epigram it was. Ivan Ilyitch, you remember it, don't you?"

"Agey Fomitch," Bodryakov began indifferently:

> "He's honoured in our Nobles' Hall
> Not without reason—for, in brief,"

"I must tell you," Ipatov interposed, "that he was elected almost unanimously, for he is a most worthy man."

> "He's honoured in our Nobles' Hall
> Not without reason—for, in brief,
> He eats and drinks to beat us all!
> So surely he's a first-rate Chief!"

Bodryakov repeated.

The old gentleman laughed.

"He—he—he! that's not bad, is it? Ever since—would you believe it—all of us when we say, for instance, good-day to Agey Fomitch, are sure to add, 'Surely he's a first-rate Chief!' And do you imagine that Agey Fomitch is vexed at it? Not a bit. No—that is not the way with us. Ask Ivan Ilyitch here."

Ivan Ilyitch merely looked away.

"Be vexed over a joke, how could one! Take Ivan Ilyitch, for instance: his nickname among us is the Adjustable Soul because he very

readily agrees to anything. Well, do you suppose Ivan Ilyitch resents it? Not he!"

Ivan Ilyitch looked, slowly blinking, first at the old gentleman and then at Vladimir Sergeitch.

The nickname of the Adjustable Soul certainly suited Ivan Ilyitch. There was not a trace in him of what is called will or character. Anyone could take him wherever he chose; one had only to say to him, "Ivan Ilyitch, come along," and he would take his hat and come; but if someone else turned up and said, "Ivan Ilyitch, don't go," he would put down his hat and stay. He was of a quiet and peace-loving disposition, he had been a bachelor all his life, he did not play cards but liked sitting by the players and gazing into their faces. He could not get on without company and detested solitude; he sank into depression when alone; however, that happened to him very rarely. He had another peculiarity: getting up early in the morning, he used to sing in a subdued voice an old ballad:

"Once upon a time a baron
Lived a simple country life." . . .

Thanks to this peculiarity, he was also nicknamed the hawfinch; it is well known that a caged hawfinch sings only once in the day, in the early morning. Such was Ivan Ilyitch Bodryakov.

The conversation between Vladimir Sergeitch and Ipatov lasted a good time but did not again take such an intellectual turn. The old man questioned Vladimir Sergeitch about his estate, about his forest lands and other holdings, about the improvements he had made or was intending to make in the management of his land; he communicated some of his own observations; he advised him, among other things, as a means of getting rid of tussocks in his meadows, to scatter oats round them, which would induce the pigs to dig them up with their snouts and so on. At last, however, observing that Vladimir Sergeitch's eyes were almost closing and that even his speech betrayed a certain languor and incoherence, the old gentlemen got up and, bowing affably, announced that he did not intend to intrude upon him any longer but that he hoped to have the pleasure

of welcoming him to dinner no later than the following day.

"And to my village," he added, "I won't say any child but I make bold to say any hen or any peasant woman you come across would show you the way; you have only to ask for Ipatovka. The horses will get there of themselves."

Vladimir Sergeitch replied with some slight hesitation, which was characteristic of him, however, that he would try to come . . . that if nothing prevented him. . . .

"Oh, no, we shall expect you for certain," the old gentleman interrupted him genially and he pressed his hand warmly and rapidly went out of the room, half turning in the doorway to exclaim, "without ceremony!"

The Adjustable Soul, Bodryakov, bowed mutely and vanished after his companion, stumbling over the threshold.

After seeing his unexpected visitors out, Vladimir Sergeitch immediately undressed, went to bed and fell asleep.

Vladimir Sergeitch Astahov belonged to that class of people who after cautiously testing

their powers in two or three different careers say of themselves that they have made up their minds to look at life from a practical point of view and devote their leisure to increasing their income. He was by no means stupid, somewhat stingy and very reasonable, was fond of reading, of society, of music, but all in moderation . . . and he behaved with the utmost propriety. He was only twenty-seven. Young men like him have become numerous of late. He was of medium height, with a good figure, his features were pleasing but small; their expression scarcely ever changed, there was always the same cool, clear look in his eyes, —only occasionally softened by a slight shade of melancholy or boredom; a polite smile always hovered about his lips. He had splendid hair, fair, silky, long and curly. Vladimir Sergeitch was reckoned to have about six hundred serfs on good land, and he had thoughts of marrying, marrying by inclination but at the same time to advantage. He particularly wanted to find a wife with good connections. He considered that he needed wider connections. In fact, he deserved the title of a "gen-

tleman"—a word which has lately come into fashion.

Getting up next morning as usual very early, our gentleman set to work and did his business rather well, which is more than one can say of all practical young men among us in Russia. He listened patiently to the confused complaints and requests of the peasants, satisfied them as far as he could, went into the quarrels and disputes between relations, talked some people round, reproved others, checked the rural clerk's report, exposed two or three pieces of sharp practice on the part of the village elder—in fact, he settled things so that he felt satisfied with himself, and the peasants as they went home spoke well of him. In spite of what he had said to Ipatov the night before, Vladimir Sergeitch made up his mind to dine and had even ordered his travelling cook to make him his favourite giblet and rice soup; but all at once, in consequence, perhaps, of the satisfaction which he had been feeling since the morning, he stood still in the middle of the room, slapped himself on the forehead and with a certain recklessness exclaimed,

"Suppose I do go to that lively old gossip!" No sooner said than done; half an hour later he was sitting in his new chaise drawn by four good peasant horses, driving to Ipatovka, which was reckoned a distance of eight miles by an excellent road.

CHAPTER II

Mihail Nikolaitch Ipatov had two houses facing each other on opposite sides of a huge pond. A long dam planted with silver poplars bordered this pond; almost on a level with the dam could be seen the red roof of a water-mill. Built exactly alike, painted the same lilac colour, the little houses looked as though they were glancing at one another with the shining panes of their clean little windows across the broad expanse of water. There was a round verandah in the front of each house and a pointed portico rose above it supported by four closely set white columns. There was an old park all round the pond: lime-trees formed avenues across it and stood in close groups about it; ancient pines with pale-yellow trunks, dark oaks, splendid ash-trees lifted their solitary high crests here and there; the dense foliage of overgrown lilacs and acacias reached the very walls,

covering all but the front of each house, from which winding brick paths ran down the slope. Bright coloured ducks and white and grey geese were swimming in separate flocks over the shining water of the pond; it was never covered with duckweed, thanks to the numerous springs which rose at the bottom of a steep, rocky ravine at its "head." The position of the houses was fine: inviting, secluded and beautiful.

In one of the little houses lived Mihail Nikolaitch himself; in the other lived his mother, a decrepit old lady of seventy. When he drove on to the dam Vladimir Sergeitch did not know to which house to go. He looked round—a serf boy was standing, barefoot, on a half-rotten log, angling. Vladimir Sergeitch called to him.

"Whom do you want, the old mistress or the young master?" asked the boy, without taking his eyes off the float.

"What mistress?" answered Vladimir Sergeitch. "I want Mihail Nikolaitch."

"Ah, the young master! Then go to the right." And the boy pulled up his line and drew out of the motionless water a small, sil-

very carp. Vladimir Sergeitch went to the right.

Mihail Nikolaitch was playing draughts with the Adjustable Soul when Vladimir Sergeitch's arrival was announced. He was extremely delighted, jumped up from his easy-chair, ran into the hall and in the hall kissed him three times.

"You find me with my invariable companion, Vladimir Sergeitch," said the talkative old gentleman, "with Ivan Ilyitch, who, by the way, is absolutely enchanted by your affability (Ivan Ilyitch looked into the corner and said nothing). He has been kind enough to stay and play draughts with me while all my young people have gone into the park; but I will send for them at once."

"But why trouble them . . ." Vladimir Sergeitch was beginning.

"Oh, dear, it is no trouble whatever! Hey, Vanka, make haste and run after the young ladies . . . tell them a visitor has come. And how do you like the place; it is not bad, is it? Kaburdin wrote a poem about it. 'Ipatovka, lovely haven' is how it begins,—the rest is very

nice, too, only I don't remember it. The park is too large, that is the only pity: beyond my means. And these two houses, so alike, as perhaps you have noticed, were built by two brothers, my father Nikolay and my Uncle Sergey; they laid out the park, too; they were paragons of friendship . . . Damon and . . . there, I have forgotten the name of the other."

"Pythion," observed Ivan Ilyitch.

"Come, is that it? Well, it does not matter. (At home the old gentleman talked in a much more free and easy manner.) As you are, I daresay, aware, Vladimir Sergeitch, I am a widower; I have lost my wife; my elder children are at boarding school; I have only the two younger ones with me and my sister-in-law, my wife's sister; you will see her immediately. But why am I offering you nothing? Ivan Ilyitch, go and see about refreshments, my dear fellow. . . . What sort of vodka do you prefer, may I ask?"

"I never drink anything before dinner."

"Upon my word, is it possible! However, as you please. A guest must be honoured and must not be crossed. We are plain people, you

know. We live here, I make bold to say, not in barbarous rusticity, but in peace and quiet, a solitary nook—that's what it is! But why don't you sit down?"

Vladimir Sergeitch sat down, still holding his hat.

"Allow me to relieve you," said Ipatov, and, with punctilious courtesy taking his hat away from him, he put it in the corner, then came back, looked into his guest's face with a cordial smile and, not knowing what agreeable speech to make to him, asked him in the most genial way whether he liked draughts.

"I play all games very badly," answered Vladimir Sergeitch.

"And that is quite right on your part," answered Ipatov, "but draughts is hardly a game, but rather an amusement, a pastime; isn't it, Ivan Ilyitch?"

Ivan Ilyitch looked at Ipatov with an apathetic expression which seemed to say, "The devil knows which it is—a game or an amusement"; but after a brief pause he brought out:

"Yes, draughts is all right."

"Chess, now, they say, is a different matter,"

Ipatov went on—"they say it is a very difficult game. But to my mind . . . ah, but here are my young people," he interrupted himself, looking through the half-open glass door that led into the park.

Vladimir Sergeitch got up, turned round and saw first two little girls about ten years old in pink cotton dresses and big hats—running nimbly up the verandah steps; not far behind them appeared a tall, plump, graceful girl of twenty, wearing a dark dress. They all came into the room; the little girls made formal curtseys to the visitor.

"Let me introduce my little daughters," said the old gentleman. "This is Katya and this is Nastya, and this is my sister-in-law, Marya Pavlovna, whom I have had the pleasure of mentioning to you already. I hope you will be good friends."

Vladimir Sergeitch bowed to Marya Pavlovna; she responded with a hardly perceptible inclination of her head.

Marya Pavlovna had a large, open knife in her hand; her thick brown hair was a little untidy, a small green leaf had caught in it, a

tress had come loose from the comb; there was a flush on her dark skin, her red lips were parted; her dress looked crumpled. She was out of breath, her eyes were shining; evidently she had been working in the garden. She went out of the room at once and the little girls ran after her.

"To smarten themselves up a little," observed the old gentleman, addressing Vladimir Sergeitch; "they must think of that, of course."

Vladimir Sergeitch smirked in response and grew a little thoughtful. Marya Pavlovna had made an impression upon him. It was many years since he had seen such a typical beauty of the Russian steppes. She soon came back, seated herself on the sofa and sat without moving. She had done her hair, but she had not changed her dress and had not even put on cuffs. There was an expression on her face not so much of pride as of severity—almost of roughness; her brow was broad and low, her nose was short and straight; from time to time her lips curved in a slow, languid smile; there was a scornful frown on her straight brows. Nearly all the time she kept her big dark eyes

cast down. "I know," her ungracious young face seemed to be saying, "I know that you are all looking at me; well, look; you weary me." When she did raise her eyes, there was something wild, beautiful and unseeing in them that recalled the eyes of a doe. She was beautifully proportioned. A classical poet would have compared her to Ceres or Juno.

"What were you doing in the garden?" Ipatov asked, trying to draw her into the conversation.

"I was cutting off the dead branches and digging the flower-beds," she said in a rather low, agreeable and resonant voice.

"Well, and are you tired?"

"The children are tired; I am not."

"I know," said the old man with a smile, "you are a regular Bobelina! And have you been in to Grandmamma?"

"Yes; she is asleep."

"Are you fond of flowers?" Vladimir Sergeitch asked her.

"Yes."

"Why don't you put your hat on when you

go out?" Ipatov observed to her; "see how red and sunburnt you are."

She passed her hand over her face and said nothing. Her hands were not large but rather broad and red. She did not wear gloves.

"And are you fond of gardening?" Vladimir Sergeitch asked again.

"Yes."

Vladimir Sergeitch began to describe a beautiful garden belonging to a wealthy landowner in his neighbourhood: "The German head gardener alone receives a salary of two thousand silver roubles," he observed among other things.

"And what is the name of the gardener?" Ivan Ilyitch asked suddenly.

"I don't remember; Meyer or Miller, I believe. Why do you ask?"

"Oh," said Ivan Ilyitch, "simply to know his surname."

Vladimir Sergeitch went on with his description. The little girls, Mihail Nikolaitch's daughters, came in, quietly sat down and began quietly listening.

A servant appeared in the doorway and announced that Yegor Kapitonitch had arrived.

"Ah! Ask him in, ask him in!" cried Ipatov.

A short, stout old gentleman came in, one of those people who are described as "stubby" or "stumpy," with a puffy and at the same time wrinkled face that recalled a baked apple. He had on a grey Hungarian jacket with black frogs and a stand-up collar; his full coffee-coloured plush breeches ended far above his ankles.

"How are you, honoured Yegor Kapitonitch!" exclaimed Ipatov, going to meet him. "It is a long time since we have seen you."

"But Mihail Nikolaitch," began Yegor Kapitonitch in a lisping and plaintive voice, first bowing to all present, "you know I am not a free man, am I?"

"In what way are you not a free man, Yegor Kapitonitch?"

"Why, Mihail Nikolaitch, my family, things to see to. . . . And then there is Matryona Markovna."

And he made a gesture of despair.

"What about Matryona Markovna?" And Ipatov winked to Vladimir Sergeitch as though wishing to secure his attention.

"Why, to be sure," said Yegor Kapitonitch, sitting down, "she is dissatisfied with me, as though you didn't know. Whatever I say it is always wrong, unrefined, improper. And why it is improper, God only knows. And the young ladies—that is, my daughters—do the same, following their mother's example. I am not saying anything against her, of course; Matryona Markovna is an excellent woman but very strict about manners."

"But upon my word, Yegor Kapitonitch, what is there wrong with your manners?"

"That's just what I think myself, but it seems she is hard to please. Yesterday, for instance, I said at table, 'Matryona Markovna' (and Yegor Kapitonitch put a most ingratiating intonation into his voice), 'Matryona Markovna,' I said, 'how careless Alyoshka is with the horses! He does not know how to drive; he has quite knocked up the black stallion!' And dear me, how Matryona Markovna did flare up and began crying shame on me! 'You don't know how to express yourself decently in ladies' society,' she said; the young ladies jumped up and left the table at once, and next day the

Biryulovsky young ladies, my wife's nieces, knew all about it. And what improper expression did I use? Judge for yourself! And whatever I say—I may speak a little incautiously sometimes; everyone does, especially at home—the Biryulovsky young ladies know all about it next day. I simply don't know what to do. Sometimes I am sitting like this thinking, as my way is—as perhaps you are aware I breathe rather heavily, and Matryona Markovna scolds me again—'Don't snuffle,' she says, 'nobody snuffles nowadays!' 'Why are you scolding, Matryona Markovna?' I say; 'you ought to be sorry for me, and you are scolding.' Well, I have had to give up thinking at home. I sit and simply look at the floor like this, yes, indeed. And the other day we were going to bed. 'Matryona Markovna,' I said, 'it's dreadful how you spoil your page, my dear; he is such a little pig,' said I, 'he might wash his face on Sunday, anyway.' Well, I hinted it delicately enough, I should have thought, but I did not please her this time, either; Matryona Markovna began putting me to shame again. 'You do not know how to behave in the com-

pany of a lady,' said she, and next day the Biryulovsky young ladies knew all about it. So how can I have the heart to go out paying visits, Mihail Nikolaitch?"

"I am astonished at what you tell me," replied Ipatov; "I should never have expected this of Matryona Markovna; I should have thought she was . . ."

"The best of women," Yegor Kapitonitch caught him up, "an exemplary wife and mother, one may say, but strict on the point of manners. She says that in everything, what is needed is *ensemble* and that I have not got that. I don't speak French, as you know, I only understand it. But what is this *ensemble* which I am lacking in?"

Ipatov, who was not very great at French himself, merely shrugged his shoulders.

"And how are your children, your sons, that is?" he asked Yegor Kapitonitch after a brief pause.

Yegor Kapitonitch looked at him sideways.

"My sons? They are all right. I am pleased with them. The young ladies have got out of hand, but I am satisfied with my sons.

Alyoshka is doing well in the service, his superiors praise him; my Alyoshka is a shrewd lad. Mihets is different; he has turned out a sort of a philanthropist."

"Why a philanthropist?"

"Goodness knows; never speaks to anyone, fights shy of us all. Matryona Markovna only makes him worse. 'Why do you follow your father's example?' she says. 'You should respect him, but you should imitate your mother's manners.' When he is grown up, he will get on too."

Vladimir Sergeitch asked Ipatov to introduce him to Yegor Kapitonitch. A conversation followed. Marya Pavlovna took no part in it; Ivan Ilyitch sat down beside her, but he only said two words to her; the little girls went up to him and began telling him something in a whisper. . . . The housekeeper, a thin old woman with a dark kerchief on her head, came in and announced that dinner was ready. They all went into the dining-room.

Dinner lasted rather a long time. Ipatov kept a good cook and had good wine, though it did not come from Moscow but from the

town of the province. Ipatov lived in comfort; he had no more than three hundred serfs but he was in debt to no one and his estate was in good order. The master of the house himself did most of the talking at dinner. Yegor Kapitonitch seconded him but did not forget to look after himself: he ate and drank in fine style. Marya Pavlovna was silent, only answering with a half smile the hurried sayings of the two little girls sitting one on each side of her; they seemed to be very fond of her. Vladimir Sergeitch attempted several times to talk to her but with no great success. The Adjustable Soul, Bodryakov, was slothful and apathetic even in his eating.

After dinner they all went on to the verandah to drink coffee. The weather was lovely; the sweet fragrance of lime-trees in full flower was wafted from the park; the summer air, slightly freshened by the thick shade of the trees and the dampness of the pond close by, was full of caressing warmth.

All at once from beyond the poplars of the dam came the sound of scurrying horses' hoofs and a moment later a lady wearing a long rid-

ing habit and a round grey hat came into sight mounted on a bay horse; she was riding at a gallop; a page rode behind on a small white cob.

"Ah!" cried Ipatov, "here is Nadyezhda Alexyevna—what a pleasant surprise!"

"Alone?" asked Marya Pavlovna, who had till that moment stood motionless by the door.

"Yes, alone . . . I suppose something has detained Pyotr Alexeitch."

Marya Pavlovna looked up from under her brows; her face was suffused with colour, and she turned away.

Meanwhile the lady on horseback rode through the little gate into the garden, galloped up to the terrace and leapt lightly to the ground without waiting for her page or Ipatov, who was coming to meet her. Dexterously picking up the hem of her long skirt, she ran up the steps and, as she landed on the verandah, she called gaily:

"Here I am!"

"You are very welcome!" said Ipatov. "How unexpected! How delightful! Allow me to kiss your hand."

"Certainly," replied the visitor, "only pull off my glove yourself; I can't do it." And stretching out her hand to him, she nodded to Marya Pavlovna. "Masha, only fancy, my brother won't be here to-day," she said with a faint sigh.

"I see that he is not here," Marya Pavlovna answered in an undertone.

"He told me to tell you that he is busy. Don't be angry. Good afternoon, Yegor Kapitonitch, good afternoon, Ivan Ilyitch, good afternoon, children. . . . Vassya," said the visitor, addressing her page, "tell them to walk Beauty up and down a little; do you hear? Masha, give me a pin, please, to fasten up my train. . . . Mihail Nikolaitch, come here."

Ipatov went nearer to her.

"Who is that new person?" she asked in a fairly loud voice.

"A neighbour, Vladimir Sergeitch Astahov, you know, the owner of Sasovo. Shall I introduce him?"

"Very well . . . presently. Oh, what lovely weather," she went on. "Yegor Kapitonitch,

tell me, does Matryona Markovna scold even in weather like this?"

"Matryona Markovna does not scold in any weather, Madam; she is only strict about manners."

"And what are the Biryulovsky young ladies doing? They know everything next day, don't they?"

And she broke into a ringing, silvery laugh.

"You are always pleased to laugh," said Yegor Kapitonitch. "But when should one laugh if not at your age?"

"Yegor Kapitonitch, don't be angry, there's a dear! Oh, I am tired, let me sit down."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna sank into a low chair and roguishly pulled her hat right down to her eyes.

Ipatov brought Vladimir Sergeitch up to her.

"Allow me, Nadyeshda Alexyevna, to present to you our neighbour, Monsieur Astahov, of whom you have probably heard a great deal."

Vladimir Sergeitch bowed and Nadyezhda Alexyevna looked up at him from under the brim of her round hat.

"Nadyezhda Alexyevna Veretyev is our neighbour," Ipatov went on, addressing Vladimir Sergeitch. "She lives here with her brother, Pyotr Alexeitch, formerly a lieutenant in the Guards. She is a great friend of my sister-in-law and is agreeably disposed to us all."

"A full and complete description," said Nadyezhda Alexyevna with a mocking smile, looking at Vladimir Sergeitch from under her hat again.

And Vladimir Sergeitch was thinking meanwhile, "She is very pretty, too." And certainly Nadyezhda Alexyevna was a very charming girl—slim and graceful, she looked much younger than she was. She was twenty-seven. She had a round face and a little head, fluffy, fair hair, a sharp, almost saucily turned-up nose, and gay, rather sly eyes. Her eyes fairly gleamed and flashed with mockery. Her extremely lively and mobile features wore at times an amusing expression; they seemed to be alive with humour. From time to time, as a rule quite suddenly, a shade of pensiveness would pass over her face, and then it became gentle and good-natured; but she could not be

thoughtful for long. She readily detected the comic side of people and drew rather good caricatures. From her birth upwards she had been spoiled by everyone and that could be seen from the first moment: people who have been spoiled in their childhood retain a certain stamp all their lives. Her brother was fond of her, though he did declare that she stung not like a bee but like a wasp, since the bee dies when it stings, while stinging means nothing to the wasp. This comparison vexed her.

"Are you staying here long?" she asked Vladimir Sergeitch, dropping her eyes and twisting her riding whip in her hands.

"No, I propose going away to-morrow."

"Where are you going?"

"Home."

"Home? Why, may I venture to ask?"

"Why? I have business at home that admits of no delay."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna looked at him.

"Are you such a . . . business-like person?"

"I try to be business-like," replied Vladimir Sergeitch. "In our practical age every decent person *ought* to be practical and business-like."

"That is perfectly true," observed Ipatov. "Isn't it, Ivan Ilyitch?"

Ivan Ilyitch simply glanced at Ipatov, while Yegor Kapitonitch commented:

"Yes, that is so."

"It is a pity," said Nadyezhda Alexyevna, "a *jeune premier* is just what we are short of. You can act comedy, can't you?"

"I have never tried my powers in that line."

"I am sure you would act well. You have such a . . . dignified deportment; that's essential for a *jeune premier* of to-day. My brother and I are thinking of setting up a dramatic society here. But we shall not confine ourselves to comedies; we shall act everything—dramas, ballets and even tragedies. Wouldn't Masha make a fine Cleopatra or Phædra? Look at her."

Vladimir Sergeitch turned round. . . . Leaning with her head against the door, Marya Pavlovna was standing with her arms folded, gazing dreamily into the distance. . . . Certainly at that moment her harmonious features were suggestive of antique sculpture. She had not

heard Nadyezhda Alexyevna's last words but, noticing that all eyes were suddenly turned upon her, she immediately guessed what was being said, flushed crimson and was on the point of retreating into the drawing-room. . . . Nadyezhda Alexyevna quickly seized her by the hand and with the coquettish tenderness of a kitten drew the almost masculine-looking hand to her and kissed it. Marya Pavlovna flushed a deeper colour.

"You are always full of mischief, Nadya," she said.

"Didn't I tell the truth about you? I appeal to you all. . . . Well, there, there, I'll stop. But I tell you again," Nadyezhda Alexyevna went on, addressing Vladimir Sergeitch, "it is a pity you are going away. It is true we have got a *jeune premier;* he forces himself upon us, indeed, but he is a very poor one."

"Who is that, may I ask?"

"Bodryakov, the poet. How can a poet be a *jeune premier!* In the first place he dresses horribly; in the second, though he writes epigrams, in the presence of any woman, even

of me, imagine, he is overcome with shyness. He lisps, always holds one arm above his head and I don't know what he doesn't do. Tell me, please, Monsieur Astahov, are all poets like that?"

Vladimir Sergeitch drew himself up a little.

"I have never known one personally and I must confess I have never sought their acquaintance."

"Yes, of course, you are a practical man. We shall have to take Bodryakov; there is no help for it. The other *jeunes premiers* are even worse. He would learn his part, anyway. In addition to the tragic parts Masha will be our prima-donna. . . . Have you heard her sing, Monsieur Astahov?"

"No," replied Vladimir Sergeitch with a smirk, "I didn't know . . ."

"What is the matter with you to-day, Nadya?" said Marya Pavlovna with an air of vexation.

Nadyezhda Alexyevna jumped up.

"Do sing us something, Masha, please do! I'll give you no peace till you do, Masha darling. I'd sing myself to entertain your vis-

itor, but you know what a horrid voice I have. But see how nicely I'll accompany you."

Marya Pavlovna did not speak for a minute.

"There's no putting you off," she said at last. "You are used to having your own way in everything, like a spoiled child. Very well, I will sing."

"Bravo, bravo!" cried Nadyezhda Alexyevna, and she clapped her hands. "Gentlemen, let us go into the drawing-room. As for having my own way, I'll score that against you," she added, laughing. "How can you expose my weaknesses before strangers? Yegor Kapitonitch, is that how Matryona Markovna puts you to shame before strangers?"

"Matryona Markovna," muttered Yegor Kapitonitch, "is a very estimable lady; only on the point of manners."

"Well, come along, come along," Nadyezhda Alexyevna interrupted him, and she went into the drawing-room.

Everyone followed her. She flung down her hat and sat down at the piano. Marya

Pavlovna stood by the wall, at some distance from Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

"Masha," she said after a moment's thought, "sing us 'The Peasant Lad the Wheat Is Sowing.'"

Marya Pavlovna began singing. Her voice was pure and strong and she sang well—simply and naturally. Everyone listened to her with great attention and Vladimir Sergeitch could not conceal his astonishment. When Marya Pavlovna had finished he went up to her and began declaring that he had had no idea . . .

"Wait a bit," Nadyezhda Alexyevna interrupted him, "there's better to come! Masha, I will comfort your Little Russian heart; sing us now 'Merry Uproar in the Oakwood.'"

"Are you a Little Russian?" Vladimir Sergeitch asked her.

"I was born in Little Russia," she answered, and she began singing the "Merry Uproar."

At first she articulated the words indifferently, but the mournfully, passionate tune of her native land by degrees roused her, her

cheeks flushed, her eyes shone, there was a warm ring in her voice. She finished.

"Good heavens, how well you sang that!" Nadyezhda Alexyevna commented, bending over the keys. "What a pity my brother is not here!"

Marya Pavlovna dropped her eyes at once and her characteristic bitter smile came on to her lips.

"And now we must have something more," observed Ipatov.

"Yes, if you would be so good," added Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Excuse me, I won't sing any more to-night," said Marya Pavlovna, and she walked away from the piano.

Nadyezhda Alexyevna looked after her, seemed thoughtful for a minute, then smiled, began playing with one finger "The Peasant Lad the Wheat Is Sowing," then suddenly broke into a brilliant polka and without finishing it, struck a loud chord, shut the piano and got up.

"It is a pity there's no one to dance with," she exclaimed. "That would have been just the thing."

Vladimir Sergeitch went up to her.

"What a wonderful voice Marya Pavlovna has," he said, "and with what feeling she sings!"

"Are you fond of music?"

"Yes . . . very."

"Such a learned person and fond of music!"

"Why do you suppose that I am learned?"

"Oh, yes, I beg your pardon; I was forgetting—you are a practical man. Where is Masha gone? Wait, I'll go and fetch her."

And Nadyezhda Alexyevna fluttered out of the room.

"Giddy head, as you see," said Ipatov, going up to Vladimir Sergeitch, "but a very good heart. And what an education she has had, you cannot fancy: she can speak in every language. Of course they are people of property, so no wonder."

"Yes," Vladimir Sergeitch acquiesced absent-mindedly, "very charming young lady. But tell me, was your wife also from Little Russia?"

"Yes. My wife was a Little Russian like her sister Marya Pavlovna. To tell the truth, my wife's accent was not perfect; though she

knew the Russian language perfectly, she did not pronounce it correctly; her vowel sounds were not quite pure; Marya Pavlovna now left her own country when she was little. Yet one can see the Little Russian blood, can't one?"

"Marya Pavlovna sings wonderfully," observed Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Yes, she does sing well. But why is it they don't bring in the tea? And what has become of the young ladies? It is tea-time."

The young ladies did not return for some time. Meanwhile the samovar was brought in and the table was set for tea—Ipatov sent for them. They came back together. Marya Pavlovna sat down at the table to pour out tea, while Nadyezhda Alexyevna went to the door of the verandah and looked out into the garden. The bright summer day was followed by a soft, clear evening; there was the glow of sunset; the broad pond, half flooded with its crimson light, stood a motionless mirror, with stately serenity reflecting in the silvery darkness of its deep bosom all the fathomless ethereal sky and the black shapes of the trees upside

down and the house. Everything had sunk into silence; there was not a sound anywhere.

"Look how beautiful," said Nadyezhda Alexyevna to Vladimir Sergeitch as he came up to her. "Out there in the pond a star has just come out, beside the lights of the house; they are red but it is golden. Here is Grandmamma coming," she added.

A bath-chair came into view from behind the lilac bushes. Two men were drawing it. The bent figure of an old lady with her head bowed on her breast was sitting muffled up in it. The fringe of her white cap almost completely covered her withered and shrunken face. The bath-chair stopped before the verandah. Ipatov went out of the drawing-room; his little daughters ran out after him. They had been scurrying from room to room like mice all the evening.

"I wish you good-evening, mother," said Ipatov, going up to the old lady and raising his voice. "How do you feel?"

"I have come to have a look at you," the old lady enunciated with an effort, in a toneless voice. "What a lovely evening! I have

been asleep all day and now my legs are aching. Ah, my legs! They are no use and they ache."

"Allow me to present to you, mother, our neighbour, Vladimir Sergeitch Astahov."

"Delighted," said the old lady, turning upon him her big, black, lustreless eyes. "I hope you will be friends with my son. He is a good man; I gave him all the education I could; of course I am only a woman. He is a bit weak yet, but with time he will grow steadier,—it's high time he did; it's time for me to hand things over to him. Is that you, Nadya?" she added, looking at Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

"Yes, Grandmamma."

"And is Masha pouring out tea?"

"Yes, Grandmamma."

"And who else is there?"

"Ivan Ilyitch and Yegor Kapitonitch."

"Matryona Markovna's husband?"

"Yes, Grandmamma."

The old lady chewed her lips.

"Well . . . Misha, I can't get at the village elder; tell him to come to me early to-morrow, —I have a great deal of business to do with

him. Everything goes wrong without me, I see. Well, that's enough, I am tired, take me home. . . . Good-bye, sir, I can't remember your name," she added, addressing Vladimir Sergeitch; "you must forgive an old woman. And don't come with me, grandchildren, there's no need. All you think of is to be running about. Sit still, sit still and learn your lessons; do you hear? Masha spoils you. Come, set off."

The old lady's head, raised with difficulty, sank back upon her breast.

The bath-chair started and moved slowly away.

"How old is your mother?" asked Vladimir Sergeitch.

"She is only seventy-two but she lost the use of her legs twenty-six years ago; it happened to her soon after my father's death. But she was a beauty."

Everyone was silent.

All at once Nadyezhda Alexyevna started.

"What's that? I believe it was a bat! Oh, how horrid!" And she went hurriedly back into the drawing-room.

"It is time for me to go home. Mihail Nikolaitch, tell them to saddle my horse."

"It's time for me to go, too," said Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Why should you go?" said Ipatov. "Stay the night here. Nadyezhda Alexyevna has only a mile and a half to go but you have nine. And why are you in a hurry, Nadyezhda Alexyevna? Wait for the moon; it will soon be up. It will be lighter riding then."

"Perhaps," replied Nadyezhda Alexyevna; "it is a long time since I have been for a ride by moonlight."

"And will you stay the night?" said Ipatov, addressing himself to Vladimir Sergeitch.

"I really don't know. . . . But if I am not in the way . . ."

"Not in the least, I assure you; I will bid them prepare a room for you at once."

"It is nice riding by moonlight," began Nadyezhda Alexyevna, as soon as they had brought the candles and handed the tea and Ipatov and Yegor Kapitonitch had sat down to a game of two-handed preference and the Adjustable Soul had installed himself beside

them without uttering a word, "especially through woods, between the nut bushes. It's uncanny and delightful and there is a strange play of light and shadow—one feels as though someone were lurking behind or in front . . ."

Vladimir Sergeitch gave a condescending smile.

"And has it happened to you," she went on, "to sit on a warm, dark, still night near a wood? It always seems to me then as though two voices were arguing hotly in a faint whisper behind me close to my ear."

"That's the throbbing of the blood," observed Ipatov.

"Your description is very poetical," observed Vladimir Sergeitch.

Nadyezhda Alexyevna looked at him.

"You think so? . . . In that case, my descriptions would not please Masha."

"Why so? Doesn't Marya Pavlovna like poetry?"

"No; she thinks it is all made up, all false; that is just what she doesn't like."

"What a strange fault to find!" exclaimed

Vladimir Sergeitch. "Made up! What else could it be? That's just what creative artists are for!"

"Well, there it is; but you oughtn't to like poetry, either."

"On the contrary, I am very fond of good poetry, when it is really good and musical and —what shall I say?—when it presents ideas, thoughts . . ."

Marya Pavlovna got up.

Nadyezhda Alexyevna turned quickly to her.

"Where are you going, Masha?"

"To put the children to bed. It is nearly nine o'clock."

"But can't they go to bed without you?"

But Marya Pavlovna took the children by their hands and went out with them.

"She is in a bad mood to-day," observed Nadyezhda Alexyevna, "and I know why," she added in an undertone, "but it will pass."

"Allow me to ask you," began Vladimir Sergeitch, "where do you intend to spend the winter?"

"Possibly here, possibly in Petersburg. I feel as though I should be bored in Petersburg."

"Bored in Petersburg? You surprise me! How is that possible?"

And Vladimir Sergeitch fell to describing all the conveniences, charms and advantages of life in the capital. Nadyezhda Alexyevna listened attentively without taking her eyes off him. She seemed to be studying his features and from time to time smiled to herself.

"I see you are very eloquent," she said at last; "I shall have to spend the winter in Petersburg."

"You will not regret it," declared Vladimir Sergeitch.

"I never regret anything; it is not worth the trouble. If you do anything silly, try and forget it as soon as possible, that's all."

"Allow me to ask," Vladimir Sergeitch asked in French after a brief silence, "have you known Marya Pavlovna long?"

"Allow me to ask," Nadyezhda Alexyevna retorted with swift mockery, "why did you ask just that question in French?"

"Oh . . . for no particular reason."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna smiled again.

"No, I have not known her very long. She is a remarkable girl, isn't she?"

"She is very original," Vladimir Sergeitch assented through his teeth.

"Well, from you, from a practical person, is that praise? I don't think so—perhaps I strike you as original, too? But the moon must have risen," she added, getting up from her seat and glancing at the open window, "that's moonlight on the tops of the poplars. It's time to go. . . . I'll go and tell them to saddle Beauty."

"He is saddled," said her page, stepping out of the shade of the park into the streak of light that fell on the verandah.

"Oh, that's right! Masha, where are you? Come and say good-bye."

Marya Pavlovna came in from the adjoining room. The men got up from the card-table.

"Are you going already?" asked Ipatov.

"Yes, it's time."

She went towards the verandah door.

"What a night!" she exclaimed. "Come nearer, put your face out; do you feel it? It

seems to be breathing. And what a scent! All the flowers are awake now. They wake up while we are thinking of going to sleep. And by the way, Masha," she added, "I have been telling Vladimir Sergeitch that you don't like poetry. And now good-bye. . . . Here they are bringing my horse."

And she ran rapidly down the verandah steps, leapt lightly into the saddle, said, "Good-bye till to-morrow," and switching the horse on the neck, galloped to the dam . . . the page trotted behind her.

Everyone looked after her.

"Till to-morrow," they heard her voice beyond the poplars. The thud of hoofs was audible for a long time in the stillness of the summer night. At last Ipatov suggested they should go back into the house.

"It certainly is nice in the open air," he said, "but we must finish our game."

All the company returned to the house. Vladimir Sergeitch began asking Marya Pavlovna why she did not like poetry.

"I don't care for it," she answered with seeming reluctance.

"But perhaps you have not read much poetry?"

"I have not read it myself but it has been read to me."

"And wasn't there a single poem you liked?"

"No, not one."

"Even Pushkin?"

"Even Pushkin."

"Why?"

Marya Pavlovna made no answer and Ipatov, turning round, said over the back of his chair, with a good-natured laugh, that she did not only dislike poetry but even sugar, and in fact could not bear sweet things at all.

"But there are poems that are not sweet," Vladimir Sergeitch retorted.

"For instance?" asked Marya Pavlovna.

Vladimir Sergeitch scratched his head. . . . He knew very little poetry by heart himself, particularly of the kind that was not sweet.

"Well," he cried at last, "do you know Pushkin's 'The Upas Tree'? No? That poem cannot possibly be called sweet."

"Repeat it," Marya Pavlovna asked him, and she dropped her eyes.

Vladimir Sergeitch looked at the ceiling, frowned, muttered to himself and at last repeated "The Upas Tree."

After the first four verses, Marya Pavlovna slowly raised her eyes, and when Vladimir Sergeitch finished, she said as slowly:

"Please repeat it over again."

"You like the poem, then?" asked Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Repeat it again."

Vladimir Sergeitch recited "The Upas Tree" again. Marya Pavlovna got up, went into another room and came back with a sheet of paper, an inkstand and a pen.

"Please write it out for me," she asked Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Certainly, with pleasure," he answered, beginning to write. "But I confess I wonder why you like this poem so much. I repeated it just to show you that not all poetry is sweet."

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Ipatov; "what do you think of those verses, Ivan Ilyitch?"

Ivan Ilyitch, as usual, simply glanced at Ipatov but did not utter a word.

"Here, it is finished," said Vladimir Serge-

itch, putting a note of exclamation at the end of the last line.

Marya Pavlovna thanked him and carried off the copy of the poem to her own room.

Half an hour later supper was served, and within an hour all the guests separated to their rooms. Vladimir Sergeitch more than once addressed Marya Pavlovna, but it was difficult to keep up a conversation with her, and the things he said did not seem to interest her much. He would probably have gone off to sleep at once on getting into bed if he had not been kept awake by his neighbour, Yegor Kapitonitch. The husband of Matryona Markovna, after undressing and getting into bed, carried on a long conversation with his servant—whom he kept admonishing. Every word he uttered reached Vladimir Sergeitch distinctly; the rooms were only divided by a thin partition wall.

"Hold the candle straight in front of you," said Yegor Kapitonitch in a complaining voice, "hold it so that I can see your face. You have turned my hair grey, you unprincipled fellow, you've turned my hair grey."

"But how have I turned your hair grey, Yegor Kapitonitch?" the indistinct and sleepy voice of the servant was heard.

"How? I'll tell you how. How many times have I said to you, 'Mitka,' I have said to you, 'whenever you go away with me anywhere on a visit, always pack two changes of clothes, particularly . . . hold the candle straight in front of you . . . particularly of under-clothes?' And what have you done to me to-day?"

"Why, what, sir?"

"You ask what? What am I to put on to-morrow morning?"

"Why, the same as you had on to-day."

"You've turned my hair grey, you ruffian. I did not know what to do with myself, I was so hot to-day. Hold the candle straight in front of you, I tell you, and don't go to sleep when your master is talking to you."

"And Matryona Markovna told me it was enough. 'Why always take such a lot of things with you?' she said. 'They only get worn out for nothing.'"

"Matryona Markovna. . . . As though it

were a woman's business to go into that! You've turned my hair grey, you have!"

"And Yahim said so, too."

"What did you say?"

"I say, Yahim said so, too."

"Yahim! Yahim!" Yegor Kapitonitch repeated reproachfully. "You'll be the death of me, you heathens. They can't speak Russian properly. Yahim! Why, does Yahim mean? Yefim—well, at a pinch one can say that,—for the real Greek name is Yevfimy, do you understand me? . . . Hold the candle straight before you. . . . But for shortness one may say Yefim, but certainly not Yahim. Yahim!" repeated Yegor Kapitonitch with an emphasis on the *ya*. "You've turned my hair grey, you villains. Hold the candle straight before you!"

And Yegor Kapitonitch went on for a long time lecturing his servant, in spite of Vladimir Sergeitch's sighs, coughs and other signs of impatience.

At last he dismissed his Mitka and went to sleep, but this did not improve matters for Vladimir Sergeitch: Yegor Kapitonitch had such a deep and powerful snore, with such playful

transitions from the highest treble to the deepest bass, with such whistling and even clicking sounds, that the very partition wall seemed to be quivering in response to it. Poor Vladimir Sergeitch felt ready to cry. It was very stuffy in his room and the feather bed on which he lay seemed to wrap his whole person in a sort of creeping heat.

In despair Vladimir Sergeitch got up at last, opened his window and greedily drank in the fragrant freshness of the night. The window looked into the park; the sky was light; the round face of the full moon was at one moment reflected clearly in the pond, at the next was drawn out into a long golden sheaf of slowly shifting sparkles. In one of the garden paths Vladimir Sergeitch saw a figure dressed like a woman: it was Marya Pavlovna; in the moonlight her face looked pale. She stood motionless and suddenly began speaking. . . . Vladimir Sergeitch cautiously put out his head.

> "Yet thither with imperious glance
> A man his fellow-man has sent"

reached his hearing.

"Imagine that!" he thought; "so the verses have had an effect on her. . . ."

And he listened with redoubled attention. But Marya Pavlovna soon ceased speaking and turned more directly facing him: he could distinguish her large dark eyes, her severe brow and lips.

Suddenly she started, turned round, passed into the shadow cast by a dense wall of tall acacias and disappeared. Vladimir Sergeitch remained standing a considerable time at the window, then at last he got into bed but did not soon fall asleep.

"A strange creature" he thought as he turned from side to side—"and they say there is nothing special to be found in the country. . . . Yes, indeed! A strange creature! I'll ask her to-morrow what she was doing in the garden."

Yegor Kapitonitch was still snoring as before.

CHAPTER III

NEXT morning Vladimir Sergeitch woke rather late and immediately after breakfast in the dining-room went home to make final arrangements on his estate, in spite of old Ipatov's efforts to keep him. Marya Pavlovna was present at breakfast; Vladimir Sergeitch did not think it necessary, however, to question her about her walk in the garden in the night: he belonged to that class of people to whom it is difficult to give themselves up for two days together to unaccustomed thoughts and conjectures. He would have had to talk about the poem and the "poetical" mood as it is called soon wearied him. He spent the whole day in the fields till dinner, for which he had a keen appetite, had a nap, and on waking up was about to look through the rural clerk's account, but before he had finished the first page ordered his carriage and set off to Ipatovka. Evi-

dently even practical people have not hearts of stone and are no fonder of being dull than ordinary mortals.

As he drove on to the dam he heard voices and the sound of music. At Ipatov's house they were singing Russian songs in chorus. He found on the verandah the whole company he had left in the morning; they all, among them Nadyezhda Alexyevna, were sitting in a semicircle round a man of about thirty-two, with a dark complexion, black hair and black eyes, wearing a short velvet coat and a red cravat tied loosely round his neck, and holding a guitar in his hands. This was Pyotr Alexeitch Veretyev, the brother of Nadyezhda Alexyevna. On seeing Vladimir Sergeitch old Ipatov went to meet him with an exclamation of delight, led him up to Veretyev and introduced them. After exchanging the usual greetings with his new acquaintance, Astahov bowed respectfully to the latter's sister.

"We are singing songs in the village style," began Ipatov, and, indicating Veretyev, he added, "Pyotr Alexeitch is our conductor—and such a conductor! you will hear."

"It is very delightful," answered Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Won't you join the chorus?" asked Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

"I should be delighted but I have no voice."

"That does not matter! Look, Yegor Kapitonitch is singing and I am singing. You need only join in. Sit down; begin, brother."

"What song shall we sing now?" said Veretyev, strumming on the guitar and, stopping suddenly, he looked at Marya Pavlovna, who was sitting beside him.

"I think it is your turn now," he said to her.

"No, you sing," answered Marya Pavlovna.

"There is a song 'Down Mother Volga,'" Vladimir Sergeitch observed with dignity.

"No, we are saving that for the end," answered Veretyev, and, striking the strings, he began singing, dwelling on each note "The Sun Is Setting."

He sang capitally, with spirit and gaiety. His manly face, which was expressive at all times, became even livelier when he was singing; now and then he shrugged his shoulders, suddenly pressed with the palm of his hand on the

strings, raised his hand, shook his curls and looked round him with a keen, proud air. In Moscow he had more than once seen the famous gipsy Ilya and was imitating him. The chorus seconded him vigorously. Marya Pavlovna's mellow voice stood out above all the others; it seemed to lead the others; but she would not sing alone and Veretyev remained the conductor to the end.

They sang many other songs.

Meanwhile a storm was coming on with the approach of evening. It had been stiflingly hot since mid-day and there had been rumblings in the distance; but now a broad storm-cloud, which had long lain like a leaden shroud on the very rim of the horizon, began to grow and appear above the tree-tops; the sultry air began quivering more perceptibly, more and more violently troubled by the approaching storm; a wind sprang up, rustled abruptly among the leaves, sank into silence, again set up a prolonged rustling and howled among the trees; a gloomy darkness moved rapidly over the land, driving before it the last glow of sunset; dense clouds, as though suddenly released, floated

upwards and flew across the sky; there came a spatter of rain, a red flash of lightning and a heavy, angry roll of thunder.

"Let us go in," said old Ipatov, "or we may get wet."

Everyone got up.

"In a minute," cried Veretyev. "Let us have the last song. Listen:

"'Oh, my porch, oh, my new porch.'"

He sang in a loud voice, rapidly striking the chords with the whole of his hand. "My porch of maple." The chorus took it up as though carried away by the tune. Almost at the same instant the rain came lashing down in streams; but Veretyev sang "My porch" to the end. Drowned from time to time by peals of thunder, the gay reckless song sounded even gayer and more reckless to the accompaniment of the noisy patter and gurgling of the rain. Finally the last outburst of the chorus rang out and the whole company ran, laughing, into the drawing-room. The little girls, Ipatov's daughters, laughed more loudly than anyone as they shook the raindrops off their dresses. Ipatov, how-

ever, by way of precaution, closed the window and the door, and Yegor Kapitonitch commended his prudence, observing that Matryona Markovna too insisted on all windows and doors being shut during a storm, since electricity acts more freely in an empty space. Bodryakov looked into his face, moved away and upset a chair. Such little mishaps were very frequent with him.

The storm was very quickly over. The doors and windows were opened again and the rooms were filled with moist fragrance. Tea was brought in. After tea the old gentlemen sat down to cards again—Ivan Ilyitch, as usual, seated himself beside them. Vladimir Sergeitch went up to Marya Pavlovna, who was sitting in the window with Veretyev; but Nadyezhda Alexyevna summoned him and immediately entered into a lively conversation with him about Petersburg and Petersburg life. She attacked it; Vladimir Sergeitch began defending it. Nadyezhda Alexyevna seemed anxious to keep him at her side.

"What are you arguing about?" said Veretyev, getting up and coming towards them.

He walked with a lazy swing; in all his movements there was something between nonchalance and indolence.

"About Petersburg," answered Nadyezhda Alexyevna. "Vladimir Sergeitch cannot say enough in its praise."

"It's a nice town," observed Veretyev—"but I think it's nice everywhere. Yes, really. Where there are two or three women and, excuse my frankness, wine, man really has nothing left to desire."

"That surprises me," answered Vladimir Sergeitch; "can you really be of the opinion that for an educated man there exists nothing? . . ."

"Perhaps . . . just so . . . I agree with you," interrupted Veretyev, who with all his politeness had the habit of not letting other people finish their sentences. "But that's not in my line; I am not a philosopher."

"I am not a philosopher either," said Vladimir Sergeitch, "and have no desire to be one, but we are talking of something quite different."

Veretyev looked at his sister with a non-

chalant air, and with a faint smile she bent down to him and half-whispered:

"Petrusha, darling, act Yegor Kapitonitch for us, do!" Veretyev's face instantly changed and God knows by what miracle in a flash became extraordinarily like that of Yegor Kapitonitch, though there was nothing in common in the features of the one and the other, and all that Veretyev did was to wrinkle up his nose and drop the corners of his mouth.

"Of course," he began, whispering in a voice exactly like Yegor Kapitonitch's—"Matryona Markovna is a lady very strict on the point of manners, but she is an exemplary wife. It is true that whatever I say . . ."

"The Biryulovsky young ladies know all about it," Nadyezhda Alexyevna put in, hardly able to restrain her laughter.

"They know all about it next day," answered Veretyev with such a killing grimace, such an embarrassed side glance that even Vladimir Sergeitch laughed.

"You have a great talent for mimicry, I see," he observed.

Veretyev passed his hand over his face; his

features resumed their ordinary expression, and Nadyezhda Alexyevna cried:

"Oh, yes, he can mimic anyone he likes. . . . He has a genius for it."

"And could you mimic me?" asked Vladimir Sergeitch.

"To be sure he can!" said Nadyezhda Alexyevna. "I should think so!"

"Oh, please do mimic me," said Astahov, addressing Veretyev—"I beg you not to stand on ceremony."

"Did you really believe her?" answered Veretyev, slightly screwing up one eye and giving his voice Astahov's intonation but so slightly and discreetly that only Nadyezhda Alexyevna noticed it and bit her lip. "You mustn't believe her, please; she may tell you all sorts of stories about me."

"And if only you knew what an actor he is!" Nadyezhda Alexyevna went on—"he can act any character. It's so wonderful. He is our stage manager and prompter and everything. It is a pity you are going away so soon."

"Sister, your partiality blinds you," Veretyev observed in a dignified voice but still with the

same intonation. "What will Mr. Astahov think of you? He will think you are a provincial young lady."

"Oh, I assure you . . ." Vladimir Sergeitch was beginning.

"Petrusha, I tell you what," put in Nadyezhda Alexyevna—"you show us how a drunken man cannot get a handkerchief out of his pocket or better act a boy trying to catch a fly on the window while it buzzes under his fingers."

"You are a regular child," answered Veretyev. He got up, however, and going to the window by which Marya Pavlovna was sitting began passing his hand over the pane and acting a boy catching a fly. The accuracy with which he imitated the pitiful buzz of the insect was really amazing. It seemed as though a real fly were under his fingers. Nadyezhda Alexyevna laughed and gradually everyone in the room began laughing. Marya Pavlovna's face did not change, however; there was not even a quiver on her lips. She sat with downcast eyes; at last she raised them and looking with a grave face at Veretyev she brought out through her teeth:

"It's a strange taste to want to make a fool of yourself."

Veretyev turned away from the window at once and after standing for a little while in the middle of the room went out on to the verandah and from it into the park which was by now wrapped in darkness.

"He is an amusing fellow, that Pyotr Alexeitch!" observed Yegor Kapitonitch, flinging down a seven of trumps on his opponent's ace. "He really is an amusing fellow!"

Nadyezhda Alexyevna got up and, going hurriedly to Marya Pavlovna, asked her in an undertone:

"What did you say to my brother?"

"Nothing," she answered.

"What do you mean by 'nothing'? It can't have been nothing."

And after a brief pause Nadyezhda Alexyevna brought out "come along," took Marya Pavlovna by the hand, made her get up and go with her into the garden.

Vladimir Sergeitch looked after the two young ladies with some surprise. But their absence did not last long; they came back within

a quarter of an hour and Pyotr Alexeitch came in with them.

"Such a lovely night!" cried Nadyezhda Alexyevna as she walked in. "How nice it is in the garden!"

"Oh, yes, by the way," said Vladimir Sergeitch—"was it you I saw in the garden last night, Marya Pavlovna?"

Marya Pavlovna glanced rapidly into his eyes.

"You were reciting Pushkin's 'Upas Tree,' if I am not mistaken."

Veretyev gave a slight frown and also began looking at Astahov.

"Yes, it was me," said Marya Pavlovna, "but I was not reciting anything; I never recite."

"Perhaps it was my fancy," began Vladimir Sergeitch, "though . . ."

"It was your fancy," Marya Pavlovna added coldly.

"What is this 'Upas Tree?'" asked Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

"Don't you know?" answered Astahov. "Pushkin's poem 'on poor and meagre soil'; don't you remember it?"

"I don't seem to . . . It's about a poisonous tree, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Like the datura. . . . Do you remember, Masha, how beautiful the datura plants were on our balcony in the moonlight with their long white flowers? Do you remember the sweet, insidious, treacherous scent they had?"

"Treacherous scent!" cried Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Yes, treacherous. Why does that surprise you? They say it is dangerous, but yet it attracts one. How is it evil things can attract one? What is evil ought not to be lovely."

"Oho! What profound reflections!" observed Pyotr Alexeitch. "We have got a long way from the poem!"

"I repeated that poem to Marya Pavlovna yesterday," said Vladimir Sergeitch, "and she liked it extremely."

"Oh, do repeat it, please," said Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

"Certainly."

And Astahov repeated "The Upas Tree."

"Too stilted," Veretyev brought out as it

were reluctantly as soon as Vladimir Sergeitch had finished.

"The poem is too stilted?"

"No, not the poem . . . I beg your pardon, it seemed to me that you did not repeat it simply enough. The thing speaks for itself; however, I may be mistaken."

"No, you are not mistaken," said Nadyezhda Alexyevna emphatically.

"Oh, no, we all know that! In your eyes I am a genius, a gifted person, who knows everything and can do everything, only unluckily he is too lazy—that's it, isn't it?"

Nadyezhda Alexyevna merely nodded her head.

"I don't dispute it; you ought to know better than I," observed Vladimir Sergeitch, and became a little sulky. "It is not in my line."

Meanwhile the game of cards was over.

"Oh, by the way, Vladimir Sergeitch," said Ipatov, getting up—"a gentleman of our neighbourhood, a most excellent and worthy man, Gavril Stepanitch Akilin, asks you to do him the honour to come to his ball. That is, I call it a ball to give it a fine name, but it is simply

a little evening party, a dance without ceremony. He would have certainly called upon you himself but he was afraid of disturbing you."

"I am very grateful to the gentleman," said Vladimir Sergeitch, "but I absolutely must go home."

"But when do you suppose the ball is? It's to-morrow. It is Gavril Stepanitch's name-day to-morrow. One day will make no difference, and you will give him so much pleasure! And it is only seven miles from here. If you will allow us, we'll drive you there."

"I really don't know," began Vladimir Sergeitch. "Are you going?"

"Yes, the whole family. Nadyezhda Alexyevna and Pyotr Alexeitch, we are all going!"

"You can ask me for the fifth quadrille now, if you like," observed Nadyezhda Alexyevna—"the first four are engaged already."

"You are very kind; and are you engaged for the mazurka?"

"I? Let me think. . . . No, I believe I am not."

"In that case, if you would be so kind I should like to have the honour . . ."

"You are going then? That's capital. Certainly."

"Bravo!" cried Ipatov. "Well, Vladimir Sergeitch, that is nice of you. Gavril Stepanitch will be simply delighted, won't he, Ivan Ilyitch?"

Ivan Ilyitch would have liked to remain silent as usual, but thought it better to emit a sound of approval.

* * * * *

"What possessed you," Pyotr Alexeitch asked his sister an hour later as he sat beside her in a light chaise which he drove himself—"what possessed you to force yourself on that muff for the mazurka?"

"I have my own reasons," answered Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

"What are they, may I ask?"

"That's my secret."

"Oho!"

And he gave a light switch to the horse which had begun to twitch its ears, snort and shy.

It was frightened by the shadow of a big bush of willow that lay across the road in the dim moonlight.

"And will you dance it with Masha?" Nadyezhda Alexyevna questioned her brother in her turn.

"Yes," he answered indifferently.

"Yes! Yes!" Nadyezhda Alexyevna repeated reproachfully. "You men," she added after a pause, "certainly do not deserve to be loved by decent women."

"Don't you think so? And that Petersburg muff, does he deserve to be?"

"Better than you do."

"Oh indeed!"

And Pyotr Alexeitch declaimed with a sigh:

"What a task it is, O Lord,
To be . . . the brother of a grown-up sister."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna laughed.

"I give you a lot of trouble, indeed! It's I who have a task with you."

"Really? I did not suspect it."

"I am not talking about Masha."

"What about then?"

Nadyezhda Alexyevna's face looked a little troubled.

"You know very well," she said softly.

"Oh, I understand! There's no help for it, Nadyezhda Alexyevna, I am fond of a glass of wine in good company, sinful man that I am!"

"Hush, brother, please don't talk like that. . . . It's *not* a joking matter."

"Tram - tram - tam - poom," Pyotr Alexeitch muttered between his teeth.

"It will be your ruin, and you make a joke of it."

"'The Peasant Lad the Wheat Is Sowing'" Pyotr Alexeitch sang aloud, switched the horse with the reins and it broke into a rapid trot.

CHAPTER IV

When he got home Veretyev did not undress, and two hours later, when the dawn was just beginning to glow in the sky, he was out of the house.

Halfway between his estate and Ipatov's, on the precipitous edge of a broad ravine, there was a small birch copse. The young trees were growing very close together; no axe had yet touched their slender stems; a patch of light but almost unbroken shadow was thrown by their fine leaves on the soft, delicate grass, all spangled with the golden heads of hen-dazzle, the white specks of wood harebells and the crimson crosses of the wild pinks. The newly risen sun flooded the whole copse with vivid but not glaring light; dewdrops were glittering on all sides; here and there a big drop would suddenly glow crimson. Everything was breathing with freshness, with life and that

innocent solemnity of the first moments of morning when everything is already so bright and yet still so silent. There was no sound but the trilling notes of larks over the distant fields and in the copse itself two or three birds were without haste trying their brief bars and as it were listening to the effect. From the wet earth rose a strong, fresh fragrance; the pure light air was stirred by cool breezes. There was a feeling of morning, of a glorious summer morning about everything: everything had the look and smile of morning like the rosy, freshly washed little face of a child just awake.

Not far from the ravine in the middle of a glade Veretyev was sitting on a cloak spread on the ground. Marya Pavlovna was standing by him, leaning against a birch-tree, with her hands behind her. They were both silent. Marya Pavlovna was looking fixedly into the distance; her white scarf had slipped off her head on to her shoulders, the breeze stirred and lifted the ends of her hastily coiled hair. Veretyev sat bending down, striking the ground with a twig.

"Well," he began at last, "are you angry with me?"

Marya Pavlovna did not answer.

Veretyev glanced at her.

"Masha, are you angry?" he repeated.

Marya Pavlovna took a rapid glance at him, turned slightly away and said:

"Yes."

"What for?" asked Veretyev, and he threw away the twig.

Again Marya Pavlovna did not answer.

"You have a right to be angry with me, though," Veretyev went on after a brief silence. "You must look upon me not merely as frivolous but even . . ."

"You don't understand me," Marya Pavlovna interrupted. "I am not angry with you on my own account at all."

"On whose, then?"

"On your own."

Veretyev raised his head and gave a short laugh.

"Ah, I understand!" he began. "Again! you are beginning to be worried again at the thought of my not doing anything with myself. You

know, Masha, you are a wonderful creature, you really are. You think so much about other people and so little about yourself. You have no egoism at all, really—there is not another girl like you in the world. But the trouble is that I don't deserve your affection; I tell you that in earnest."

"So much the worse for you. You feel and you do nothing."

Veretyev gave a short laugh again.

"Masha, pull your hand from behind your back and give it to me," he said with an insinuating caress in his voice.

Marya Pavlovna merely shrugged her shoulder.

"Give me your beautiful, honest hand; I want to implant a tender and respectful kiss upon it, as the frivolous pupil kisses the hand of his indulgent preceptor."

And Veretyev stretched forward towards Marya Pavlovna.

"Oh, don't!" she said; "you are always laughing and joking and will joke away all your life."

"H'm! Joke away my life! A new expres-

sion! I suppose, Marya Pavlovna, you used the verb 'joke away' in a transitive sense?"

Marya Pavlovna frowned.

"Don't, Veretyev," she repeated.

"Joke away my life," repeated Veretyev, and he got up—"but you will make a worse business of it than I shall; you will waste your life in taking things seriously. Do you know, Masha, you remind me of a scene in Pushkin's 'Don Juan.' You have not read Pushkin's 'Don Juan?' "

"No."

"Oh, no, I forgot, you don't read poetry. A lady called Laura has visitors come to see her; she drives them all away and is left alone with a man called Carlos. They go out together on the balcony; it is a glorious night. Laura admires it and Carlos suddenly begins to point out to her that she will grow old some day. 'What of it?' Laura answers—"at this moment perhaps it is cold and raining in Paris but here 'the night is fragrant of lemons and laurels.' What's the use of looking into the future? Look about you, Masha, is it not lovely here? Look how everything is rejoicing in

life, how youthful it all is. And aren't we young ourselves?"

Veretyev went closer to Marya Pavlovna; she did not draw back but she did not turn her head towards him.

"Smile, Masha," he went on, "only your kind, good smile and not your usual mocking one. I love your good, kind smile—raise your proud, stern eyes. Well? You turn away. Hold out your hand to me, anyway."

"Ah, Veretyev," Masha began, "you know I can't talk. You tell me about that Laura. But she was a woman. It's pardonable for a woman not to think of the future."

"When you speak, Masha," replied Veretyev, "you continually blush from pride and shyness; the blood comes rushing to your cheeks in a flood of colour; I like that awfully in you."

Marya Pavlovna looked straight into Veretyev's eyes.

"Good-bye," she said, and she pulled her scarf on to her head. Veretyev held her back.

"There, there," he cried, "wait a little! What is it you want? Give me my orders. Would you like me to go into the service, to become a

farmer? Would you like me to publish songs with accompaniments on the guitar, to publish a collection of poems, of drawings, to take up painting, sculpture, rope-dancing? I'll do anything, anything you tell me, if only you will be pleased with me. I will really, Masha, believe me."

Marya Pavlovna glanced at him again.

"All that is only words, not deeds. You assure me you obey me . . ."

"Of course, I do obey."

"You obey me but how many times have I asked you . . ."

"What?"

Marya Pavlovna hesitated.

"Not to drink," she said at last.

"Ech, Masha, Masha! So you are at that too! My sister distresses herself about that. But in the first place I am not a drunkard; and in the second, do you know why I drink? Look at that swallow there. . . . See how boldly it disposes of its little body; it flings it wherever it likes! See, it has darted upwards and now it has dropped down; it actually squealed with joy; do you hear? So that's why I drink,

Masha—to experience the same sensations as that swallow . . . to fling oneself where one will, to fly where the fancy takes one . . ."

"But what is it all for?" Masha interrupted.

"How can you ask that? What else is there to live for?"

"And can't it be done without drinking?"

"No, it can't: we are all blighted and degenerate. Passion, now . . . that produces the same effect. That is why I love you."

"As you do wine . . . much obliged."

"No, Masha; I love you not as I do wine. Wait a little, I will prove it to you some day when we are married and go abroad. Do you know I am dreaming already how I shall lead you before the Venus of Milo. It will be just the moment to repeat:

> "If with grave eyes she stood before
> The Queen of Love from Melos famed,
> Of the two goddesses, I trow,
> The marble beauty would be shamed."

Why is it I keep talking in verse to-day? It must be the influence of the morning. What air! It's like wine."

"Wine again," observed Marya Pavlovna.

"What of it? Such a morning and you with me—what could be more intoxicating? 'With her grave eyes.' Yes," Veretyev went on, looking intently at Marya Pavlovna, "that is so. . . . But yet I remember that I have seen—not often it is true, but I have seen—those splendid dark eyes look tender. And how lovely they are then! Come, don't turn away, Masha, laugh, anyway . . . Show me your eyes merry, at least, if they won't grant me a tender look."

"Leave off, Veretyev," said Marya Pavlovna; "let me go; it is time I was at home."

"I'll make you laugh, though," Veretyev interposed, "upon my word I will. Oh, look, there runs a hare!"

"Where?" asked Marya Pavlovna.

"Over there, beyond the ravine, through the field of oats—someone must have frightened it; they don't run in the morning. Would you like me to stop it?"

And Veretyev gave a loud whistle. The hare at once squatted, moved its ears, tucked in its forepaws, drew itself up, munched, sniffed and munched again! Veretyev nimbly squatted on his heels like the hare and began moving his

nose, sniffing and munching like the hare. The hare passed its paws once or twice over its face, shook itself—its paws must have been wet with the dew—pricked up its ears and bounded off. Veretyev rubbed his cheeks with his hands and shook himself too. . . . Marya Pavlovna could not refrain from laughing.

"Bravo!" cried Veretyev, and he jumped up, "bravo! You certainly are not a coquette. Do you know that if any society lady had teeth like yours she would be forever laughing! But that is what I love you for, Masha, that you are not a society lady, you don't laugh without occasion, you don't wear gloves, and it is so nice to kiss your hands because they are sunburnt and one feels how strong they are. . . . I love you because you don't go in for being clever, because you are proud and silent, don't read books, don't like poetry . . ."

"Would you like me to repeat some poetry to you?" Marya Pavlovna interrupted him with a peculiar expression in her face.

"Poetry?" said Veretyev in surprise.

"Yes, some poetry which that Petersburg gentleman recited to us last night."

"The 'Upas Tree' again? So you really were repeating it at night in the garden? The poem suits you. . . . But do you really like it so much?"

"Yes, I like it."

"Repeat it."

Marya Pavlovna was a little abashed.

"Repeat it, repeat it," Veretyev insisted.

Marya Pavlovna began repeating it. Veretyev stood facing her, folded his arms and listened. At the first line Marya Pavlovna lifted her eyes towards the sky: she did not want to meet Veretyev's eyes. She repeated the verses in her mellow even voice which recalled the notes of a violoncello; but when she reached the lines:

> "And at his mighty sovereign's feet
> Fell the poor slave, and died,"

her voice quivered, her haughty, immobile eyebrows were raised naïvely like a child's and her eyes rested on Veretyev with involuntary devotion.

He suddenly flung himself at her feet and embraced her knees.

"I am your slave," he cried, "I am at your feet, you are my sovereign, my goddess, my ox-eyed Hera, my Medea . . ."

Marya Pavlovna was going to push him away; but her hands lay motionless on his curly hair and with a smile of confusion she bowed her head.

CHAPTER V

Gavril Stepanitch Akilin, who was giving the ball, belonged to that class of country gentlemen who arouse the wonder of their neighbours by their faculty of living well and keeping open house on insufficient means. Though he had no more than four hundred serfs he entertained the whole province in a huge stone mansion erected by himself, with columns, with a tower, and a flagstaff upon it. His estate had come to him from his father and had never been noted for its good condition; Gavril Stepanitch was for many years absent from it, serving in Petersburg; at last, fifteen years previously, he had returned to his native place with the grade of collegiate assessor, with a wife and three daughters. He began simultaneously building and introducing improvements, immediately set up an orchestra and gave dinner parties. At first everyone prophesied

that he would inevitably be ruined before long; more than once there were rumours that Gavril Stepanitch's estate was to be sold by auction; but the years passed, dinner parties, balls, fêtes, concerts followed one another as before, new buildings rose like mushrooms from the ground, and Gavril Stepanitch's estate was still not put up to auction and he went on living as before and had even grown stout of late. Then the neighbours' gossip took another turn; they began hinting at some considerable sums which had, they said, been kept secret, there was talk of buried treasure. . . . "If he had been a good manager," the gentlemen of the neighbourhood argued, "one could understand it, but he is not, not at all! That's what is so surprising and unaccountable." However that might be, everyone was very ready to visit Gavril Stepanitch; he was hospitable and would play cards for any stake. He was a little man with grey hair and a conical-shaped head, a yellow face and yellow eyes, always carefully shaved and scented with eau-de-cologne. He wore on ordinary days as well as on holidays a loose blue swallowtail, buttoned up to the neck, a big

cravat into which he had the habit of sticking his chin, and he prided himself on his linen; he screwed up his eyes and thrust out his lips when he took snuff and spoke very softly and affably. Gavril Stepanitch was not distinguished by his liveliness and in fact was not prepossessing in appearance and did not look particularly intelligent, though there was sometimes a gleam of cunning in his eye. He had made good matches for his two elder daughters, the younger was still at home unmarried. Gavril Stepanitch had also a wife, an insignificant creature who had not a word to say for herself.

At seven o'clock in the evening Vladimir Sergeitch arrived at Ipatov's wearing a dress-coat and white gloves. He found them all dressed ready to set off; the little girls were sitting stiffly, afraid of crumpling their starched white frocks. Old Ipatov genially reproached Vladimir Sergeitch when he saw that the young man was wearing a dress-coat, and pointed to his own frock-coat. Marya Pavlovna wore a deep pink muslin dress which suited her admirably. Vladimir Sergeitch paid her a few compliments—Marya Pavlovna's beauty at-

tracted him though she was evidently shy of him; he liked Nadyezhda Alexyevna, too, but the freedom of her manners rather embarrassed him. Moreover, in her words, in her looks and smiles there was often a shade of mockery, and that troubled his well-bred Petersburg soul. He would have had no objection to joining her in mocking other people, but it was disagreeable that she might perhaps be capable of laughing at him.

The ball had already begun; a good many guests had assembled and the home-trained orchestra was blaring, droning and squeaking in the gallery when the Ipatov family with Vladimir Sergeitch entered the ballroom. Their host met them at the door, thanked Vladimir Sergeitch for the feeling way in which he had so agreeably surprised them—as he expressed himself—and, taking Ipatov by the arm, he led him off to the drawing-room, to the card-tables.

Gavril Stepanitch had had an inferior education, and everything in his house—the music, the furniture, the food, the wines—could not even be called second rate. On the other hand there was plenty of everything, and he was not

stuck up and did not give himself airs. . . . The gentlemen of the neighbourhood asked nothing more of him and were perfectly satisfied with the entertainment he gave them. At supper, for instance, they handed caviare cut into hard blocks and over-salted, but no one prevented one from taking it with one's fingers, and there was plenty to wash it down with; cheap wine, it is true, but real wine made from grapes, not any other beverage. The springs in the furniture were so stiff and unyielding as to be rather uncomfortable, but to say nothing of there being many armchairs and sofas that had no springs at all, anyone could get hold of a wool-embroidered cushion to put on his seat, for such cushions embroidered by Madame Akilin's own hands lay about in great profusion everywhere—and then there was nothing left to be desired.

In short Gavril Stepanitch's house was perfectly in keeping with the social and unceremonious manners of the X. district, and it was simply due to Gavril Stepanitch's own modesty that the marshal of the nobility elected was not he, but a retired major called Podpekin, a very

respectable and worthy man though he combed his hair from his left ear over his right temple, dyed his moustache a purplish tint and, suffering from asthma, sank into depression after dinner.

And so the ball had already begun. A quadrille of ten couples was being danced. The gentlemen were officers of a regiment stationed in the neighbourhood, young or youngish landowners, and two or three officials from the town. Everything was as it should be, everything was going well. The marshal of the nobility was playing cards with a retired actual civil councillor and a rich gentleman, the owner of three thousand serfs. The actual civil councillor wore on his first finger a diamond ring, spoke very slowly and always kept his heels together and his feet turned out in the position affected by old-fashioned dancers; he never turned his head, which was half concealed by a magnificent velvet collar. The wealthy gentleman, on the other hand, was continually laughing, raising his eyebrows and flashing the whites of his eyes.

The poet Bodryakov, a man of clumsy and

wild appearance, was talking in a corner with the learned historian Yevsyukov; they were holding each other by their buttons. Near them one gentleman with an extraordinarily long waist was expounding some bold opinions to another gentleman who gazed timidly at the top of his head. Mammas in various coloured caps were sitting in a row along the walls; at the doors there were groups of gentlemen of a humbler sort, young men looking embarrassed, older men looking unassuming; but there is no describing it all. All was as it should be, I repeat.

Nadyezhda Alexyevna had arrived before the Ipatovs. Vladimir Sergeitch saw her dancing with a handsome young man with expressive eyes, with a thin black moustache and shining teeth, wearing a smart dress-coat and a gold chain hanging in a semi-circle on his waistcoat. Nadyezhda Alexyevna was dressed in blue with white flowers; a small wreath of the same flowers was twisted round her curly hair. She smiled, flirted her fan and looked gaily about her; she felt herself the queen of the ball. Vladimir Sergeitch went up to her, bowed and,

looking at her affably, asked her whether she remembered her promise of yesterday.

"What promise?"

"You are dancing the mazurka with me, aren't you?"

"Yes, of course."

The young man who was standing near Nadyezhda Alexyevna suddenly turned crimson.

"I think you have forgotten, Mademoiselle," he began, "that you had promised the mazurka to me."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna was confused.

"Oh, dear, what am I to do?" she said: "please forgive me, Monsieur Steltchinsky, I am so careless: I am really so ashamed."

Monsieur Steltchinsky said nothing and dropped his eyes; Vladimir Sergeitch drew himself up slightly.

"Be so kind, Monsieur Steltchinsky," Nadyezhda Alexyevna went on; "we are old freinds while Monsieur Astahov is a stranger: do not put me in a difficult position; allow me to dance with him."

"As you please," said the young man. "It's for you to begin, though."

"Thank you," Nadyezhda Alexyevna pronounced and fluttered off to meet her vis-à-vis.

Steltchinsky glanced after her, then looked at Vladimir Sergeitch. Vladimir Sergeitch in his turn looked at him and walked away.

The quadrille was soon over. Vladimir Sergeitch walked up and down the ballroom a little, then went into the drawing-room and stopped beside one of the card-tables. All at once he felt someone behind him touch his arm; he turned round—Steltchinsky stood before him.

"I want a couple of words with you in the next room with your kind permission," he pronounced in French with great politeness and not with a Russian accent.

Vladimir Sergeitch followed him.

Steltchinsky stopped at the window.

"In the presence of a lady," he said in the same language, "I could not say anything but what I did; but you do not, I hope, imagine that I really intend to surrender to you my right to dance the mazurka with *M-elle Veretieff*."

Vladimir Sergeitch was surprised.

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"What I mean," Steltchinsky answered calmly, his nostrils dilating as he thrust his hand into his waistcoat, "is that I don't intend to, that's all."

Vladimir Sergeitch thrust his hand into his waistcoat, too, but his nostrils did not dilate.

"Allow me to observe, my dear sir," he began, "you may put *M-elle Veretieff* in an unpleasant position by your action, and I imagine . . ."

"That would be most painful to me, but no one hinders you from withdrawing, declaring yourself unwell or going away . . ."

"I am not going to do that. What do you take me for?"

"In that case I shall be forced to ask you to give me satisfaction."

"Satisfaction . . . in what sense?"

"In the obvious sense."

"You are challenging me to a duel?"

"Certainly, if you do not give up the mazurka." Steltchinsky tried to utter these words in the most unconcerned manner possible. Vladimir Sergeitch's heart gave a jump. He looked into the face of his unexpected assailant. "Good Lord," he thought, "what idiocy!"

"You are not joking?" he said aloud.

"It is not my habit to joke," Steltchinsky replied with dignity, "and especially with persons with whom I am not acquainted. You will not give up the mazurka?" he added after a brief pause.

"I will not give it up," answered Vladimir Sergeitch, as though reflecting.

"Very good! We will fight to-morrow.

"To-morrow morning my second will call on you." And with a polite bow Steltchinsky retired, evidently very well pleased with himself.

Vladimir Sergeitch remained a few moments longer at the window.

"Here's a nice business," he thought. "That's what comes of making new acquaintances! I was an ass to come! Very nice! Charming!"

He pulled himself together at last, however, and went into the ballroom.

There they were already dancing the polka. Marya Pavlovna flitted by him dancing with Pyotr Alexeitch, whom he had not noticed till then; she looked pale and even melancholy; then Nadyezhda Alexyevna whirled by him, all brightness and delight, with a little bandy-legged

but ardent artillery officer; at the next round she was dancing with Steltchinsky, who as he danced kept tossing his hair back.

"Why, my good sir," Vladimir Sergeitch heard the voice of Ipatov behind him, "why are you looking on and not dancing? Confess now, though we do live, so to say, in a quiet backwater, it is not bad here, is it?"

"Nice sort of backwater, damn it!" thought Valdimir Sergeitch, and muttering some sort of answer to Ipatov he went to the other end of the ballroom.

"I shall have to find a second," he thought, continuing his reflections, "and where the devil am I to find him? Veretyev is out of the question; I don't know any of the others; who the devil would have thought of such an absurd business?"

Vladimir Sergeitch was fond of mentioning the devil when he was vexed.

At that moment Vladimir Sergeitch's eyes fell on the Adjustable Soul, Ivan Ilyitch, who was standing doing nothing by the window.

"Wouldn't he do?" he thought, and, shrug-

ging his shoulders, he added almost aloud, "I shall have to ask him."

Vladimir Sergeitch went up to him.

"I have just had a very queer adventure," our hero began with a forced smile—"only imagine, a young man, a complete stranger, has just challenged me to a duel; it is utterly impossible to refuse it; I must have a second; *may* I ask you?"

Although Ivan Ilyitch was distinguished, as the reader is aware, by imperturbable indifference, even he was strcuk by so unusual a suggestion. He stared at Vladimir Sergeitch in perplexity.

"Yes," said Vladimir Sergeitch, "I should be very much indebted to you; I know no one here. You are the only one who . . ."

"I cannot," Ivan Ilyitch brought out as though waking up from sleep—"it is utterly impossible."

"Why? You are afraid of unpleasantness; but I hope it will all be kept secret."

As he said this, Vladimir Sergeitch felt that he flushed and was confused.

"How stupid! How awfully stupid it all is!" he was saying inwardly.

"Excuse me, I can't possibly," repeated Ivan Ilyitch, shaking his head and drawing back, upsetting a chair again as he did so.

It was the first time in his life that he had to refuse a request; but it was such a request!

"Anyway," said Vladimir Sergeitch in an agitated voice, catching hold of his arm, "you will do me the favour not to speak to anyone of what I have told you, I beg you most earnestly."

"That I can do, that I can do," Ivan Ilyitch replied hurriedly, "but the other thing I can't, say what you like, I am not equal to it."

"Very well, very well," said Valdimir Sergeitch, "but don't forget that I count upon your discretion. . . . I shall inform that gentleman to-morrow," he muttered to himself with vexation, "that I could not find a second; he can arrange himself as he likes best; I am a stranger here. What the devil possessed me to apply to this fellow! But what could I do?"

Vladimir Sergeitch felt very, very much put out.

Meanwhile the ball went on. He felt very much inclined to go away at once, but till the mazurka was over going away was not to be thought of. How could he let his opponent triumph? Unluckily for Vladimir Sergeitch, the master of the ceremonies was a free-and-easy young man with long hair and a hollow chest, over which a black satin cravat, with a huge gold pin in it, flowed like a small waterfall. This young man had the reputation all over the province of being completely versed in all the customs and traditions of the highest society, though he had only spent six months in Petersburg and had not succeeded in penetrating into anything higher than the houses of the collegiate councillor Sandaraki and his son-in-law, the civil councillor, Kostandaraki: he led the dances at every ball, signalled to the musicians by clapping his hands; in the midst of the blare of the trumpets and the scraping of the fiddles shouted, *"En avant deux!"* or *"Grande chaine"* or *"A vous, mademoiselle,"* and pale and perspiring, kept flying about, gliding and scraping on the floor. He never began the mazurka before midnight. "And that's

something to be thankful for," he would say; "in Petersburg I should have kept you waiting for it till two o'clock."

The ball seemed long to Vladimir Sergeitch. He wandered like a shadow from the ballroom to the drawing-room, from time to time exchanging frigid glances with his rival, who did not miss a single dance, asked Marya Pavlovna for a quadrille, but she was engaged—and once or twice said a few words to his solicitous host who seemed troubled by the look of boredom on the face of his new acquaintance. At last the strains of the longed-for mazurka were heard. Vladimir Sergeitch sought out his partner, brought two chairs and sat with her among the last couples, almost facing Steltchinsky.

As was to be expected, the young leader of the dances was the first to begin. His countenance as he began the mazurka, the way he drew his partner after him, while he struck the floor with his foot and tossed his head—to describe all this is almost beyond the pen of man.

"I think you are bored, Monsieur Astahov," Nadyezhda Alexyevna began, addressing Vladimir Sergeitch.

"I? Not in the least. What makes you think so?"

"Why, from your expression. . . . You have not smiled once since you came in. I did not expect that of you. It doesn't suit you, practical gentlemen, to scowl and be unsociable *à la* Byron—leave that to the poets."

"I notice, Nadyezhda Alexyevna, that you frequently call me a practical person by way of mocking at me. I suppose you look upon me as a cold and very sensible being, not capable of anything. But do you know what I can tell you: a practical person may often feel anything but light-hearted, though he does not think it necessary to display to others what is passing within him; he prefers to be silent!"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Nadyezhda Alexyevna with a glance at him.

"Nothing," said Vladimir Sergeitch, with affected indifference, and he assumed a mysterious air.

"But still?"

"Nothing, really. . . . One day you will know, later."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna would have pursued

her questions but at that instant a young lady, the daughter of the host, led up to her Steltchinsky and another gentleman in blue spectacles.

"Life or death?" she asked in French.

"Life," cried Nadyezhda Alexyevna, "I don't want death yet."

Steltchinsky bowed and led her off.

The gentleman in blue spectacles referred to as death led off the daughter of the house. Both names had been suggested by Steltchinsky.

"Tell me, please, who is this Mr. Steltchinsky?" Vladimir Sergeitch asked Nadyezhda Alexyevna as soon as the latter came back to her seat.

"He is in the Governor's service, a very agreeable young man. He does not belong here. He is rather a coxcomb but that's in their blood. I hope you have not had any difficulties with him about the mazurka?"

"Not the slightest," Vladimir Sergeitch replied with some hesitation.

"I am so forgetful! You can't imagine."

"I ought to rejoice in your forgetfulness: it

has given me the pleasure of dancing with you this evening."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna looked at him, slightly screwing up her eyes:

"Really? You are glad to dance with me?"

Vladimir Sergeitch responded with a compliment. Little by little he began talking freely. Nadyezhda Alexyevna was always very charming, and was especially so that evening; Vladimir Sergeitch thought her delightful. The thought of the duel next day, working upon his nerves, gave brilliance and liveliness to his talk; under the influence of it he allowed himself some exaggeration in the expression of his feelings . . . "Well, come what may!" In all his words, in his stifled sighs, in the sudden gloom that from time to time clouded his face, there was something of mystery, of involuntary sadness and picturesque despair. He unbent at last, so far as to be talking of love, of women, of his future, of his conception of happiness and of what he asked of fate. . . . He expressed himself indirectly, in hints. On the eve of possible death

Vladimir Sergeitch flirted with Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

She listened to him attentively, laughed, shook her head, sometimes disputed with him, sometimes pretended to be incredulous. . . . The conversation, frequently interrupted by the other dances, took at last a rather strange turn . . . Vladimir Sergeitch began questioning Nadyezhda Alexyevna about herself, about her character, about her tastes. . . . At first she turned off his questions with a jest, then suddenly to his surprise asked him when he was going away.

"Where?" he asked, wondering.

"Home."

"To Sasovo?"

"No, home, to your estate, seventy miles away?"

Vladimir Sergeitch dropped his eyes.

"I should like it to be as soon as possible," he brought out with a troubled face. "I expect, to-morrow . . . if I am still living. I have business, you know. But what makes you ask me about it?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

"What was the reason, though?"

"Nothing," she repeated. "I am surprised at the curiosity of a man who is going away to-morrow, and to-day cares to find out what I am like."

"But really . . ." Vladimir Sergeitch was beginning.

"Oh, this is appropriate . . . read this," Nadyezhda Alexyevna interrupted him with a laugh, handing him the paper from a sweet which she had just picked up from a little table, and she got up to meet Marya Pavlovna, who had come up to her with another lady.

Marya Pavlovna was dancing with Pyotr Alexeitch. Her face was flushed and heated but did not look any happier.

Vladimir Sergeitch looked at the paper—on it was printed in inferior French type: *Qui me neglige me perd.*

He looked up and caught Steltchinsky's eyes fixed upon him. Vladimir Sergeitch gave a forced smile, leaned his elbow on the back of

a chair and crossed his legs, as though to say, "So much for you!"

The ardent artillery officer whirled Nadyezhda Alexyevna back to her seat, slowly rotated with her in front of it, made a bow, clanked his spurs and departed. She sat down.

"Allow me to ask," Vladimir Sergeitch began deliberately, "how am I to take that motto?"

"What was it?" said Nadyezhda Alexyevna. "Oh, yes! *Qui one neglige me perd.* Why! It is an excellent practical rule which may apply at every turn. To succeed in any pursuit one must neglect nothing. . . . One must try for all and perhaps one will get something. But it's funny: here am I, I . . . giving good advice to a practical person like you."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna laughed and for the rest of the mazurka Vladimir Sergeitch tried in vain to go back to the previous conversation. Nadyezhda Alexyevna turned it off with the wilfulness of a capricious child. Vladimir Sergeitch talked to her of her feelings and she either refrained from answering him altogether or drew his attention to the dresses of the

ladies, to the absurd faces of some of the men, to the perfection of her brother's dancing, to the beauty of Marya Pavlovna; she talked about music, of what they had done the day before, of Yegor Kapitonitch and his wife Matryona Markovna . . . and only at the very end of the mazurka when Vladimir Sergeitch was beginning to make his last bows she said with an ironical smile on her lips and in her eyes:

"And so you really are going away to-morrow?"

"Yes; and perhaps for a long journey," Vladimir Sergeitch said significantly.

"I wish you *bon voyage.*" And Nadyezhda Alexyevna went quickly to her brother, whispered something gaily in his ear, then asked aloud:

"Are you grateful to me? Yes? Aren't you? But for me he would have asked *her* for the mazurka."

He shrugged his shoulders and said:

"It will lead to nothing, anyway."

She led him into the drawing-room.

"The flirt!" thought Vladimir Sergeitch, and, picking up his hat, he slipped unnoticed out of

the ballroom, found his groom whom he had told to be in readiness and was putting on his overcoat when to his extreme astonishment, his groom told him that they could not go, that the coachman had somehow succeeded in getting drunk and that there was no possibility of waking him. Swearing very briefly but very expressively at the absent coachman (there were other people in the hall), and telling the groom that if the coachman were not in a fit state by the early morning no one in the world could imagine what the consequences would be, Vladimir Sergeitch went back to the ballroom and asked the butler to give him a bedroom without waiting for the supper which was being laid in the drawing-room. The master of the house seemed suddenly to spring out of the floor just at Vladimir Sergeitch's elbow (Gavril Stepanitch wore boots without heels and so moved about noiselessly) and began persuading him to remain, telling him that at supper there would be some first-rate caviare; but Vladimir Sergeitch refused, saying he had a headache. Half an hour later he was lying on

a small bed under a short quilt, trying to go to sleep.

But he could not sleep—though he tossed from side to side, though he tried to think of something else, the figure of Steltchinsky persisted in haunting him. . . . Now he was aiming. . . . Now he was firing. . . . "Astahov is killed," someone was saying. Vladimir Sergeitch could not be called valiant though he was not a coward, either; but the idea of fighting a duel with anyone had never entered his head. . . . The notion of fighting—with his good sense, peaceable disposition, regard for propriety, dreams of future prosperity and making a good marriage! If he had not been the person concerned, he would have burst out laughing, the whole business struck him as so ludicrous and absurd. To fight! And with whom and for what?

"Damn it all! What nonsense!" he unconsciously exclaimed aloud, "well, and if he really does kill me," he continued his meditations, "I must take measures anyway and make arrangements. . . . Will anyone regret me?"

And with vexation he closed his wide-open

eyes, drew the quilt up to his neck . . . but still could not sleep.

There was a faint flush of dawn in the sky and, worn out with feverish sleeplessness, Vladimir Sergeitch began dropping into a doze when he was suddenly conscious of a weight on his feet. He opened his eyes . . . Veretyev was sitting on his bed.

Vladimir Sergeitch was extremely surprised, especially when he noticed that Veretyev had no coat on, that his shirt was unbuttoned and his bare chest was visible, that his hair was falling over his forehead and that his face, too, looked changed, and Vladimir Sergeitch sat up in bed.

"May I ask . . ." he began with a gesture of surprise.

"I have come to see you," Veretyev began in a hoarse voice, "in this condition, excuse me. . . . We had a little drink . . . I wanted to reassure you. I said to myself: there's a gentleman in bed up there who probably can't sleep —let us come to his aid! Take note: you are not going to fight to-morrow and you can sleep. . . ."

Vladimir Sergeitch was more surprised than ever.

"What did you say?" he muttered.

"Yes, it is all settled," Veretyev went on, "that gentleman from the shores of the Vistula . . . Steltchinsky . . . apologises to you . . . you will get a letter from him to-morrow . . . I tell you again, it's all over. . . . You can snore!"

And saying this, Veretyev got up and made unsteadily for the door.

"But excuse me, excuse me," Vladimir Sergeitch began, "how did you find out, and how can I believe . . ."

"Ah! You think that I am . . . h'm! (and he gave a slight lurch forward). I tell you . . . he will send you a letter to-morrow. . . . You don't attract me particularly but generosity is my weak point. And what's the good of talking? . . . It's all such nonsense. . . . But confess," he added with a wink, "you were a little scared, weren't you?"

Vladimir Sergeitch was angry.

"Excuse me, sir," he said.

"Oh, all right, all right," Veretyev interrupted

with a good-natured smile. "Don't get excited. You don't know that we never have a ball without an incident of this sort. . . . It's the regular thing. It never leads to anything. As though anyone wants to make a target of himself! But why not show off a bit—to a newcomer, for instance? *In vino veritas.* Though neither you nor I know Latin. But I see from your appearance that you are sleepy. I wish you a good-night, you practical person and well-intentioned mortal. Accept that wish from another mortal who is not worth a halfpenny. *Addio, mio caro!*"

And Veretyev went away.

"What on earth is the meaning of it?" exclaimed Vladimir Sergeitch a little later, and he brought his fist down on the pillow. "It's beyond everything! . . . It must be explained! I won't put up with it!"

For all that, five minutes later he was in a quiet, sound sleep. His heart was lighter. . . . A danger passed softens and fills with sweetness the heart of man.

This is what had happened before Veretyev's

sudden interview with Vladimir Sergeitch in the night.

Gavril Stepanitch had a second cousin, a bachelor, living in his house. When there were balls young men would run down to his room on the ground floor to smoke in the intervals between the dances, and after supper they assembled there for a friendly drink. On that night a good many guests had gathered together in his room. Steltchinsky and Veretyev were among them; Ivan Ilyitch, the Adjustable Soul, had strolled down there also. They mixed punch. Though Ivan Ilyitch had promised Astahov to say nothing about the approaching duel, yet when Veretyev casually asked him what he had been talking about to that muff (Veretyev always spoke of Astahov in this way), the Adjustable Soul could not refrain from repeating his conversation with Vladimir Sergeitch word for word.

Veretyev laughed, then grew thoughtful.

"But whom is he fighting with?" he asked.

"Well, that I can't tell you," answered Ivan Ilyitch.

"Whom was he talking to, anyway?"

"With different people . . . Yegor Kapitonitch—surely he is not fighting with him?"

Veretyev walked away from Ivan Ilyitch.

And so the punch was made and they began drinking it. Veretyev was sitting in the most conspicuous place; gay and reckless, he took the lead in all young men's parties. He flung off his coat and cravat. He was asked to sing; he took the guitar and sang several songs. The wine began to go to their heads; the young men began drinking toasts. Steltchinsky, with a flushed face, suddenly leaped onto the table and, holding his glass high above his head, cried aloud:

"To the health of—I know whom," he added hurriedly; he drank off the wine, dashed the glass to the floor and went on: "May my enemy be smashed to fragments like this to-morrow!"

Veretyev, who had been watching him for some time, raised his head quickly.

"Steltchinsky," he said, "to begin with, get off that table,—it's unseemly; besides, your boots are nothing to boast of. And then come here; I have something to say to you."

He drew him aside.

"Listen, my boy," he said. "I know you are going to fight to-morrow with that Petersburg gentleman."

Steltchinsky started.

"How . . . who told you?"

"I tell you. And I know whom you are fighting about, too."

"Who is it? It would be interesting to know that."

"Oh, what a Talleyrand! Why, about my sister, of course. Come, come, don't pretend to be surprised. It makes you look like a goose. I can't imagine how it came about, but I know it is so. Come, my boy," Veretyev went on, "what's the use of pretending? I know you've been paying her attention for a long time."

"But that proves nothing."

"Leave off, please. But listen to what I am going to say to you. I won't allow this duel on any account. Do you understand that? All this folly will recoil on my sister. Excuse me, but as long as I am alive . . . I will not allow it. If you and I go to ruin, that's

what we deserve, but she ought to have a long life and a happy one. Yes, I swear," he added with sudden heat, "I would betray everyone else, even those who are ready to sacrifice everything for me, but I won't let anyone touch her."

Steltchinsky gave a forced laugh.

"You are drunk, my dear fellow, and raving . . . that's all."

"And aren't you? But whether I am drunk or not does not matter. I am talking sense. You will not fight with that gentleman, that I can guarantee. What possessed you to pick a quarrel with him? Were you jealous, or what? How true it is that people are fools when they are in love! Why, she only danced with him to prevent him from asking. . . . But that's not the point. The duel will not come off."

"H'm! I should like to know how you are going to prevent me?"

"Why, like this—if you won't promise this minute to give up this duel, I will fight you myself."

"Indeed?"

"My dear fellow, don't doubt it. I will insult you in the most original way imaginable before everyone this minute and then we will fight across a handkerchief if you like. But I imagine this would not be to your liking for several reasons, would it?"

Steltchinsky fired up, began to say that this was intimidation, that he would allow no one to interfere in his private affairs, that he should consider nothing . . . and ended by giving way and renouncing all attempts on the life of Vladimir Sergeitch. Veretyev embraced him and in less than half an hour they were for the tenth time drinking *Brüderschaft;* that is, drinking with arms interlocked. . . . The young leader of the dance drank *Brüderschaft* with them, too, and at first kept pace with them but at last fell asleep in the most innocent way and lay for a long time on his back in a condition of complete unconsciousness. The expression of his little pale face was both pathetic and amusing. . . . Good heavens, what would the society ladies of his acquaintance have said, if they had seen him in

such a sorry plight! But fortunately he did not know any society ladies.

Ivan Ilyitch, too, distinguished himself that night. To begin with, he astonished the assembled gentlemen by suddenly striking up:

"Once upon a time a baron . . ."

"The hawfinch! The hawfinch is singing!" they all shouted. "The hawfinch never sings at night!"

"As though I only knew one song!" retorted Ivan Ilyitch, excited by the wine. "I know others, too."

"All right, show us your talents!"

Ivan Ilyitch was silent for a space and then began in a bass voice—"Krambambuli, the home of my fathers," but so queerly and out of tune that a general shout of laughter drowned his voice and he subsided.

When the party broke up, Veretyev went to see Vladimir Sergeitch and the brief conversation we have described already took place between them.

Very early the next day Vladimir Sergeitch set off for Sasovo. He spent the whole morn-

ing in agitation, almost mistook a merchant who called on him for a second, and heaved a sigh of relief when the footman brought him a letter from Steltchinsky. Vladimir Sergeitch read the letter through several times—it was very cleverly written. Steltchinsky began with the words *la nuit porte conseil, Monsieur* —and did not apologise, since in his opinion he had not insulted his opponent in any way; at the same time he acknowledged that he had been too hasty the evening before and concluded by saying that he was completely at the service *de M-r Astakhof,* but for himself no longer desired satisfaction. After writing and dispatching a reply filled with a courtesy that almost approached mockery and a feeling of dignity which did not, however, show a trace of boastfulness, Vladimir Sergeitch sat down to his dinner rubbing his hands, ate it with great relish, and immediately after it set off to his own home, without having even sent a change of horses in advance. The road by which he drove lay within three miles of Ipatov's house. . . . Vladimir Sergeitch gazed at it.

"Farewell, quiet backwater!" he muttered

ironically. The figures of Nadyezhda Alexyevna and Marya Pavlovna flitted for a moment before his imagination; he waved them off, turned away and fell into a doze.

CHAPTER VI

Over three months passed. The autumn was far advanced; the yellow woods were losing their last leaves, the blue-tits had arrived and, sure sign of the approach of winter, the wind was beginning to groan and howl. But there had not yet been much rain, and the mud on the roads was not yet very sloppy. Vladimir Sergeitch took advantage of this circumstance to visit the chief town of the province in order to conclude some business transactions. He spent the morning driving from one place to another, and in the evening went to the club. He met several acquaintances in the big, gloomy clubroom, among them an old retired cavalry officer, Flitch, whom everyone knew as a capable business man, a wit, a cardplayer and a gossip. Vladimir Sergeitch got into conversation with him.

"Oh, by the way," Flitch exclaimed sud-

denly, "a lady you know was passing through the town the other day and she sent you her greetings."

"What lady?"

"Madame Steltchinsky."

"I don't know any Madame Steltchinsky."

"You knew her before she was married. . . . Her maiden name was Veretyev . . . Nadyezhda Alexyevna. Her husband was in our Governor's service. You must have seen him, too. . . . A lively fellow, with a little moustache. He has hooked an attractive little party, and with money, too."

"You don't say so!" said Vladimir Sergeitch. "So she has married him. . . . H'm! And where was she going?"

"To Petersburg. She told me to remind you about some motto. . . . What was it, if I may be so inquisitive?"

And the old gossip's sharp nose looked alert with expectation.

"I don't remember, really, some joke," replied Vladimir Sergeitch. "And where is her brother, may I ask?"

"Pyotr? Oh, he is in a bad way."

Mr. Flitch turned up his fox-like little eyes and heaved a sigh.

"How so?" asked Vladimir Sergeitch.

"He's gone to the dogs! He is on the road to ruin."

"Where is he now, then?"

"Nobody knows. He is gone off after some gipsy girls, that's the most likely story. He is not in the province, that I can answer for."

"And old Ipatov, is he still living there?"

"Mihail Nikolaitch? The queer little chap, you mean? He is still there."

"And is everyone in his house . . . as before?"

"Yes, to be sure. How would it be for you to marry his sister-in-law? She is a regular piece of antique sculpture, isn't she? He-he! People did say, you know . . ."

"Really," said Vladimir Sergeitch, screwing up his eyelids.

At that moment Flitch was invited to a game of cards and the conversation dropped.

Vladimir Sergeitch had intended to return home quickly but a messenger arrived from the village elder at Sasovo telling him that six

peasant homesteads had been burnt to the ground, and he decided to go down himself. It was reckoned about forty miles from the town to Sasovo. Vladimir Sergeitch reached that evening the little lodge with which the reader is already familiar, at once summoned the village elder and the rural clerk, duly upbraided them, went in the morning to inspect the scene of the fire, directed that various steps should be taken, and when he had dined, decided, after a brief hesitation, to pay a call on Ipatov. Vladimir Sergeitch would have stayed at home if he had not heard from Flitch that Nadyezhda Alexyevna had left the neighbourhood. He did not want to meet her again; but he felt no disinclination to have another look at Marya Pavlovna.

As on his first visit, Vladimir Sergeitch found Ipatov playing draughts with the Adjustable Soul. The old man was delighted to see him; Vladimir Sergeitch fancied, however, that his face was careworn, and his words did not flow with the same readiness as of old.

Vladimir Sergeitch exchanged silent glances

with Ivan Ilyitch. They both felt a twinge of discomfort; but they soon got over it.

"Are all your household well?" inquired Vladimir Sergeitch as he sat down.

"They are all quite well, thank you," answered Ipatov. "Only Marya Pavlovna is not quite the thing . . . she keeps to her room for the most part now."

"Has she got a cold?"

"No . . . not exactly. She will come in to tea."

"And Yegor Kapitonitch? How is he getting on?"

"Ah, it is all over with Yegor Kapitonitch. His wife is dead."

"Impossible!"

"She died after twenty-four hours' illness of cholera. You wouldn't know him now, he is not like himself. 'Without Matryona Markovna life is a burden to me. I shall die,' he says, 'and thank God; I don't care to live,' he says. Yes, the poor fellow is quite lost."

"Oh, dear, how unfortunate!" cried Vladimir Sergeitch. "Poor Yegor Kapitonitch!"

Everyone was silent for a space.

"I hear your neighbour is married," said Vladimir Sergeitch, flushing slightly.

"Nadyezhda Alexyevna? Yes, she is married." Ipatov stole a side-long glance at Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Yes . . . yes, she is married and gone away."

"To Petersburg?"

"To Petersburg."

"I expect Marya Pavlovna misses her? I think they were great friends."

"Of course she misses her. That can't be helped. Though as for her friendship, I can assure you young ladies' friendship is worse than men's. It's all right while they are together, but out of sight is out of mind."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, indeed. Take Nadyezhda Alexyevna, for instance. We have not had one letter from her since she went away, and the promises she made, the vows! No doubt she has other things to think of now."

"Has she been gone long?"

"It must be six weeks. She galloped off the day after the wedding, in foreign style."

"They say her brother is not here, either?" said Vladimir Sergeitch a little later.

"Yes, he is gone, too. You see, they are city people; they are not likely to stay long in the country!"

"And don't you know where he has gone?"

"No."

"He is here to-day and gone to-morrow," observed Ivan Ilyitch.

"He is here to-day and gone to-morrow," repeated Ipatov. "And you, Vladimir Sergeitch, what good news is there of you?" he added, turning round in his chair.

Vladimir Sergeitch began telling about himself. Ipatov listened—listened and exclaimed at last:

"But why doesn't Masha come? Ivan Ilyitch, you might go and fetch her."

Ivan Ilyitch went out of the room and returning, announced that Marya Pavlovna was just coming.

"Has she a headache?" Ipatov asked in a low voice.

"Yes," answered Ivan Ilyitch.

The door opened and Marya Pavlovna came

in. Vladimir Sergeitch got up, bowed and was so amazed that he could not utter a word: so changed was Marya Pavlovna since he had seen her last! All the colour had gone from her wan cheeks; there were wide, dark rings round her eyes; there was a look of grief about her tightly set lips; her whole face, dark and immovable, seemed turned to stone.

She lifted her eyes and there was no light in them.

"How do you feel?" Ipatov asked her.

"I am quite well," she answered, and sat down to the table on which a samovar was already boiling.

Vladimir Sergeitch was pretty thoroughly bored that evening; and indeed everyone was depressed. The conversation was continually taking a melancholy turn.

"Hark, what a tune it's playing!" Ipatov said, among other things, listening to the howling of the wind. "Summer has long past; the autumn is passing, too, and winter is upon us. The snowdrifts will lie about us again. If only the snow would come soon! As it is, it makes one depressed to go into the garden.

. . . It's a perfect ruin. The branches creak and rattle. . . . Yes, the fine days are over!"

"They are over," repeated Ivan Ilyitch.

Marya Pavlovna looked out of the window in silence.

"Please God, they will come back," observed Ipatov.

No one answered him.

"Do you remember the delightful singing we had here?" said Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Yes, those were pleasant times!"

"But you might sing," said Vladimir Sergeitch, turning to Marya Pavlovna; "you have such a splendid voice."

She did not answer.

"And how is your mother?" said Vladimir Sergeitch to Ipatov, not knowing how to keep up the conversation.

"Thank God, she keeps pretty middling in spite of her infirmities. To-day she went out in her chair and I tell you she is like an old broken tree—it creaks and creaks; and yet some strong young sapling will fall, and it will go on standing. Ech, ech!"

Marya Pavlovna dropped her hands on her knees and bowed her head.

"And yet she has a bad time of it," Ipatov said again; "it's a true saying that old age is no happiness."

"Youth isn't happiness, either," said Marya Pavlovna as though to herself.

Vladimir Sergeitch wanted to go home that evening but it was such a dark night that he did not venture to go. He was given the same upstairs room in which three months before he had spent a troubled night—owing to Yegor Kapitonitch.

"I wonder whether he still snores?" thought Vladimir Sergeitch and remembered his admonitions to his servant; he recalled Marya Pavlovna's sudden appearance in the garden. . . .

Vladimir Sergeitch went to the window and put his head against the cold pane. His own face looked in at him dimly from without; his eyes seemed up against a curtain of darkness and only after a little time could he distinguish against the starless sky the branches of trees

twisting convulsively in the black night. They were being lashed by the relentless wind.

All at once it seemed to Vladimir Sergeitch as though he caught a glimpse of something white on the ground. . . . He looked, smiled, shrugged his shoulders and, exclaiming half aloud, "The tricks imagination will play one!" got into bed.

He fell asleep very quickly but he was not fated to spend a peaceful night on this occasion either. He was roused by a hurrying to and fro in the house. He lifted up his head from the pillow. . . . He heard agitated voices, exclamations, scurrying footsteps, the banging of doors; then there was a sound of women's weeping, shouts were heard in the garden, other shouts answered them in the distance. . . . The agitation in the house increased, and grew noisier every moment. . . . "There must be a fire!" flashed through Vladimir Sergeitch's mind. In alarm he jumped out of bed and ran to the window, but there was no glow of fire; only red points of light were moving rapidly along the garden paths between the trees —men were running with lanterns. Vladimir

Sergeitch went quickly to the door, opened it and ran straight into Ivan Ilyitch. Pale, dishevelled and half-dressed, the latter was rushing along without knowing where he was going.

"What is it? What has happened?" asked Vladimir Sergeitch in excitement, clutching vigorously at his arm.

"She is lost, she is drowned, she has thrown herself into the water," Ivan Ilyitch responded in a breathless voice.

"Who is in the water, who is lost?"

"Marya Pavlovna! Who else could it be? He has been the death of her, poor darling! Help! Run, good people, make haste! Make haste, lads!"

And Ivan Ilyitch dashed down the stairs.

Vladimir Sergeitch got into his boots, flung his greatcoat over his shoulders and ran after him.

He found no one in the house, they had all rushed into the garden; only the little girls, Ipatov's daughters, met him in the passage close to the front door; half dead with fright they were standing in their white petticoats with clasped hands and bare feet, near a night-

light on the ground. Vladimir Sergeitch ran through the drawing-room, passing an overturned table, on to the verandah. Through the shrubbery, in the direction of the dam, lights were gleaming and shadows were fleeting. . . .

"The hooks! Run for the hooks!" he heard the voice of Ipatov.

"The net, the net! The boat!" cried other voices.

Vladimir Sergeitch ran towards the shouts. He found Ipatov on the bank of the pond; a lantern hung on a branch threw a vivid light on the old man's grey head. He was wringing his hands and staggering as though he were drunk; on the grass near him a woman was writhing and sobbing; people were running to and fro. Ivan Ilyitch was already up to his knees in the water and feeling the depth with a pole; the coachman was undressing, shivering all over; two men were dragging a boat along the bank; the rapid thud of horses' hoofs could be heard along the village street. . . . The wind blew, shrieking, as though doing its utmost to put out the lanterns. The waters of the black and menacing pond splashed noisily on the bank.

"What do I hear!" cried Vladimir Sergeitch, running up to Ipatov. "Is it possible?"

"The hooks! Quick, the hooks!" moaned the old man in reply.

"But perhaps you are mistaken, Mihail Nikolaitch!"

"No, how can it be a mistake!" the woman lying on the grass—Marya Pavlovna's maid—said in a tearful voice, "wretch that I am, I heard her myself jump into the water, cry out, 'Save me,' and then once more, 'Save me'!"

"How was it you did not prevent her?"

"How could I prevent her, sir? Why, by the time I missed her she was gone, but I must have had a foreboding in my heart; the last few days she has been in such grief and did not say a word; but I knew and I ran straight into the garden, as though someone had told me. All at once I heard something go plop into the water: 'Save me,' I heard her cry . . . 'save me!' . . . Oh, dear, kind people!"

"But perhaps it was your fancy?"

"My fancy, indeed! And where is she, then? What has become of her?"

"So that was the white thing I thought I saw in the darkness," thought Vladimir Sergeitch.

Meanwhile men had run up with hooks, brought a net and begun laying it out on the grass, numbers of people came up, there was a great running to and fro . . . the coachman snatched up a hook, the village elder another; they both jumped into the boat, pushed off and began dragging the water with the hooks; they were lighted from the bank. Their movements and their shadows seemed strange and terrible in the darkness, on the troubled water in the dim and uncertain light of the lantern.

"It's caught," the coachman cried suddenly

Everyone stood faint with expectation.

"A stump," said the coachman, and pulled out the hook.

"Come back, come back," they shouted from the bank, "you will do nothing with the hooks, you want the net."

"Yes, yes, the net," others chimed in.

"Stay," cried the village elder, "my hook has caught too. . . . I think it's something soft," he added a little later.

A patch of white came into sight near the boat.

"The young lady!" cried the village elder—"It's she!" He was right . . . the hook had caught Marya Pavlovna by the sleeve of her dress. The coachman got hold of her at once, they drew her out of the water . . . with two strong strokes the boat was brought to the bank. . . . Ipatov, Ivan Ilyitch, Vladimir Sergeitch all rushed to Marya Pavlovna, lifted her up and carried her home in their arms. They undressed her, warmed her and tried to restore respiration. . . . But all their efforts were in vain. Marya Pavlovna did not come to herself. . . . Life had fled.

Next morning early Vladimir Sergeitch left Ipatovka; before he set off he went to take the last farewell of the dead girl. She was lying on the table in the drawing-room in a white dress. Her thick hair was hardly dry, there was a look of sorrowful bewilderment on her pale face which was still unchanged; her parted lips seemed striving to speak and ask some question . . . her crossed arms seemed pressing on her bosom as though in anguish. . . . But with whatever bitter thoughts the poor girl had

perished, death had laid upon her its imprint of eternal silence and resignation. . . . And who can say what the dead face expresses in those few moments when for the last time it meets the eyes of the living before vanishing forever and perishing in the grave?

Vladimir Sergeitch stood in decorous melancholy before the body of Marya Pavlovna, crossed himself three times and went out without noticing Ivan Ilyitch, who was quietly weeping in the corner. . . . And he was not the only one who wept that day, all the servants in the house wept bitterly: nothing but good was remembered of Marya Pavlovna.

A week later old Ipatov wrote as follows in reply to a letter that had come at last from Nadyezhda Alexyevna:

"A week ago, dear Madam Nadyezhda Alexyevna, my sister-in-law, your friend Marya Pavlovna, made an end of her life by throwing herself at night into the pond and we have already consigned her body to the earth. She took this grievous and terrible step without saying good-bye to me, without leaving a letter

or the smallest note to convey her last wishes. . . . But you know better than anyone, Nadyezhda Alexyevna, on whose soul this great and mortal sin should fall! May the Lord be your brother's judge, but my sister-in-law could neither forget him nor survive the separation."

By the time Nadyezhda Alexyevna received this letter she was in Italy, where she had gone with her husband, Count de Steltchinsky, as he was styled in all the hotels. It was not only the hotels he visited, however: he was frequently seen in gambling saloons, in the Kursaals in watering places. . . . At first he lost a great deal of money, then left off losing, and his face assumed the peculiar expression, half suspicious, half impudent, which is seen in a man liable to being suddenly involved in some unpleasant affray. . . . He rarely saw his wife. Nadyezhda Alexyevna was not dull in his absence, however. She developed a taste for the arts. Her acquaintances chiefly consisted of artists and she liked discussing the beautiful with young men. Ipatov's letter grieved her extremely but did not prevent her from going

the same day to the "Cave of Dogs" to watch unfortunate animals gasp for breath as they were plunged into sulphurous fumes.

She did not go alone. She was accompanied by several admirers. Among them the most amiable was considered to be Mr. Popelin, an unsuccessful French painter with a beard and a check jacket. He sang the newest songs in a thin tenor, made jokes in a very free-and-easy style and ate a very great deal though he was very lean.

CHAPTER VII

It was a sunny, frosty day in January; numbers of people were walking along the Nevsky. The clock on the tower of the Town Hall struck three. Our old acquaintance Vladimir Sergeitch Astahov was walking among others on the broad flags sprinkled with yellow sand. He had grown much more manly looking since we parted from him; he had grown whiskers and was stouter all over but did not look older. He followed the crowd without haste, from time to time looking about him: he was expecting his wife; she had meant to drive up in their carriage with her mother. It was about five years since Vladimir Sergeitch had married, exactly as he wished; his wife was wealthy and with the best connections. Affably lifting his superbly brushed hat as he met his numerous acquaintances, Vladimir Sergeitch moved forward with the free step of a man satisfied

with his lot. All at once, close to the Arcade, he was almost run into by a man in a Spanish cloak and a jockey cap; his face was rather the worse for wear, his moustache was dyed and his big eyes looked out from swollen and puffy eyelids. Vladimir Sergeitch moved aside with dignity, but the gentleman in the cap stared at him and suddenly exclaimed:

"Ah! Mr. Astahov, how are you?"

Vladimir Sergeitch made no reply and stood still in amazement. He could not imagine how a gentleman who had the temerity to appear on the Nevsky in a jockey cap knew his surname.

"You don't recognise me," the gentleman in the cap went on; "I saw you eight years ago in the country, in T. province, at the Ipatovs. My name is Veretyev."

"Oh, dear! I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Vladimir Sergeitch, "but how you have changed."

"Yes, I am older," answered Pyotr Alexeitch, and he passed over his face a hand without a glove, "but you, now, have not changed."

Veretyev did not so much look older as

fallen off and deteriorated. Tiny, delicate wrinkles covered his whole face and when he talked his lips and cheeks twitched slightly. Everything about him indicated that he had been living hard.

"Where have you been lost all this time that one has seen nothing of you?" asked Vladimir Sergeitch.

"I have been wandering about. And have you been in Petersburg all the time?"

"For the most part in Petersburg."

"Are you married?"

"Yes."

And Vladimir Sergeitch assumed a rather severe air as though to say to Veretyev, "Don't venture to ask me, my good fellow, to introduce you to my wife."

Veretyev seemed to understand him. A careless smile faintly stirred his lips.

"And how is your sister?" asked Vladimir Sergeitch. "Where is she?"

"I can't tell you for certain. I expect she is in Moscow. I have not had a letter from her for a long time."

"And is her husband living?"

"Yes."

"And Mr. Ipatov himself?"

"I don't know; I expect he is alive too; but he may be dead."

"And that other gentleman—what was his name?—Bodryakov, wasn't it?"

"The one you asked to be your second, do you remember, when you were in such a funk? The devil only knows."

Vladimir Sergeitch with a dignified face remained silent.

"I always recall with pleasure those evenings," he continued, "when I had the opportunity (he had almost said 'honour') of making the acquaintance of your sister and yourself. She is a very charming person. Do you still sing as agreeably?"

"No, I've lost my voice. . . . Yes, that was a nice time."

"I visited Ipatovka once since," Vladimir Sergeitch went on, raising his eyebrows mournfully; "I think that was what they called the village—on the very day of a terrible event. . . ."

"Yes, yes, that was horrible, horrible," Veretyev hurriedly interrupted him. "Yes, yes—and do you remember how you almost fought a duel with my present brother-in-law?"

"H'm! Yes, I remember," Vladimir Sergeitch replied deliberately. "However, I must confess, it is so long ago that it all seems to me rather like a dream now."

"Like a dream," Veretyev repeated, and his pale cheeks flushed—"like a dream . . . no, it was not a dream, not for me, anyway. It was the time of youth, of gaiety, of happiness, the time of boundless hopes and unconquerable strength, and if it was a dream, it was a lovely dream. But that we have grown old and stupid, and dye our moustache, and lounge about the Nevsky and are good for nothing like broken-down hacks, that we have lost our savour, have worn threadbare, whether we are stuck up and dignified or whether we are simply loafers, and, very likely, drown our sorrow in wine—that is more like a dream, and a most hideous dream. Our life has been lived and lived in vain, absurdly, vulgarly—that's what

is bitter! If only one could shake that off like a dream, if only one could wake up from that. . . . And then everywhere, always one awful memory, one phantom. . . . But good-bye."

Veretyev moved rapidly away, but on reaching the doors of one of the principal cafés of the Nevsky Prospect, stopped, went in and tossing off at the bar a glass of orange bitters, he crossed the billiard-room, dark and foggy with tobacco fumes, and went into a back room. There he found some friends, old comrades: Petya Lasurin, Kostya Kovrovsky, Prince Serdyukov and two gentlemen who were addressed simply as Vasyuk and Filat. They were all men no longer young, though unmarried; some were a little bald, others were turning grey, they had wrinkled faces and double chins; in short, these gentlemen had all, as they say, begun going to seed. They all, however, still looked upon Veretyev as an exceptional man, destined to astonish the world, and he was more intelligent only in that he was very well aware of his complete and essential uselessness. And even outside his own circle there were people

who thought of him that if he had not ruined himself, something very remarkable might have come of him. . . . These people were mistaken: nothing ever does come of the Veretyevs.

Pyotr Alexeitch's friends met him with their usual greetings. He puzzled them at first by his gloomy expression and bitter remarks, but he soon recovered, grew merry and things went as usual.

As soon as Veretyev left him, Vladimir Sergeitch frowned and drew himself up. Pyotr Alexeitch's sudden outburst had greatly perplexed and even offended him.

"Grown stupid, drink, dye our moustache . . . *parlez pour vous, mon cher,*" he said at last almost aloud and snorting once or twice with involuntary indignation, was about to continue his walk.

"Who was that talking to you?" he heard a loud and self-confident voice behind him.

Vladimir Sergeitch turned round and saw one of his intimate friends, a certain Mr. Pomponsky. This Mr. Pomponsky, a tall and stout gentleman, held a rather important post and

had never once, even in his early youth, had the slightest doubt of his own efficiency.

"Oh, a queer fellow," said Vladimir Sergeitch, taking Pomponsky's arm.

"Upon my soul, Vladimir Sergeitch, is it possible for a gentleman to be seen talking in the street to an individual in a jockey cap? It's unseemly! I am amazed! Where could you have made the acquaintance of such a person?"

"In the country."

"In the country? . . . Country neighbours are not recognised in town . . . *ce n'est pas comme il faut.* A gentleman must always behave like a gentleman if he wants . . ."

"Here is my wife," Vladimir Sergeitch made haste to interrupt him. "Let us go to her."

And the two gentlemen made their way to a smart, low carriage, from the window of which the pale, fatigued and irritably haughty face of a woman still young, but already a little faded, was looking out.

Another lady who also seemed cross, her mother, could be seen behind her. Vladimir Sergeitch opened the carriage door and gave his

wife his arm. Pomponsky approached the mother-in-law and both couples walked along the Nevsky accompanied by a short, black-haired footman in greenish gaiters with a big cockade on his hat.

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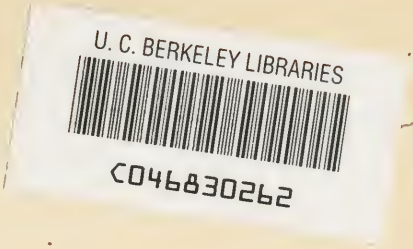

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